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Competing Memories: Tallahassee's Civil War Commemorations, Exhibits, and Celebrations

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COMPETING MEMORIES: TALLAHASSEE’S CIVIL WAR
COMMENORATIONS, EXHIBITS, AND CELEBRATIONS

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This work is dedicated to my grandparents, parents, and family, all of whom have supported and guided me in their own way but most especially by their example. My determination, strength, courage, and perseverance are a direct result of your teachings. I will never take for granted the opportunities that you have all provided me with, the sacrifices that you have endured, and I hope that I will always make you proud through my words, actions, and academic accomplishments.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the forms in which the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation are commemorated, celebrated, and remembered in Tallahassee. It will further investigate how or if these events within Tallahassee present a clear, accurate and universal recollection of the city’s participation in the Civil War. Included in this discussion are the competing official and vernacular memories present in the Tallahassee community. This work will also assist in identifying the purpose of these public types of observances, the function they serve in society, and the extent to which we allow private memory to dictate how and what we commemorate.

It will discuss these issues through an assessment of a forthcoming exhibit at the National Archives and Records Administration, and current exhibits located at the Museum of Florida History, and the Old Capitol Museum, each of which focus on different aspects of the Civil War. An evaluation of the annual celebrations held at The Walker-Ford Community Center and the Knott House museum will further contribute to the discussion of current competing memories in Tallahassee.
INTRODUCTION

There are few instances in life that one can recall with great clarity. So incredibly poignant and vivid are these moments that they remain completely untouched or blurred with the passage of time. They vary from person to person, some good, some bad, and some completely unexpected, yet there they remain, ingrained in our minds prepared to resurface when reminded of an associated date, place, smell, or individual. For me, one of the most unforgettable moments in my life occurred on a not so typical hot humid day in the basement of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) building located in Washington DC during the summer of 2008. As a museum associate intern working with the National Archives Experience, better known as the Museum Exhibits department, I was offered an opportunity most historians can only dream about. God smiled down on me as I prepared to join a very unique and extraordinarily fortunate select group of professionals allowed to touch and view without any form of restriction one of the most significant documents in the history of the United States of America.

I arrived at work that morning as I had the previous two weeks, excited, curious, and prepared to perform research and to offer my ideas, opinions, and suggestions about the NARA’s new upcoming exhibit entitled, Discovering the Civil War. There was no other place I would have rather worked that summer, and there I was enjoying the marriage of my two favorite fields, museums and archives in a setting that months earlier appeared completely out of reach. The agenda for that day called for a training session with the Archives’ registrar Karen Hibbit. I had met Hibbit on a previous occasion during an informal lunch with another co-worker. With notepad and pen in hand, I made my way down through the white and unassuming hallways leading from my office cubicle to two double doors accessible through a magnetic card swipe and coded door lock and only then to those with proper clearance. As I stood there, waiting for an answer to my knock at the door, I prepared mentally for the next hour or so of observation and note taking. Once inside the registrars’ office, I was provided a quick tour of the office itself and introduced to other individuals working at various cubicles. I paid minimal attention to the maintenance men working on yet another set of double
doors within the same office. Their project appeared unassuming for the moment; little did I know this would soon change.

After the quick greetings and introductions, we then returned to Hibbit’s cubicle and got down to business. She began the discussion of the database program employed by the Archives, with an in-depth walk-through of the extensive log-in process, followed by ways in which to utilize the program for maximum benefit, including the use of other helpful tips and tricks along the way. At this point, a member of the maintenance crew approached Hibbit and mentioned that they had completed the repair of the double doors. Soon after they walked away, Hibbit mentioned that she needed to take a look for herself and double check the work. I followed her over and watched as she opened and closed the doors using the same methods of security mentioned earlier. It was at this moment that she turned to me and another intern, who had just entered the room, to ask if we were interested in “seeing something pretty cool.” Without a moment’s hesitation, we both responded, “yes, of course.” She led us into what is known as the “vault” and proceeded to step in front of a locked grey cabinet.

We stood there watching as she unlocked this set of doors and pulled out a large box, placing it on a table located next to the cabinet. We took a step closer as the registrar removed the lid, smiled at us and said, “It’s the Emancipation Proclamation.” No sooner had the words left her mouth, when the other intern and I, with our mouths opened wide open in astonishment, inched even closer, so that our faces remained only inches away from this document. She carefully turned the pages over to reveal the final page, and there, half-way down the page and with great clarity were the signatures of Abraham Lincoln and U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward. The other intern and I ogled at this document that lay before us, canvassing every line, every inch, in an attempt to capture the magnitude of this document coupled with our great fortune in being permitted to view it without any form of restriction. After a brief few minutes, the other intern asked the registrar if she could slightly touch a corner of the document with her finger, to which the registrar agreed. We both reached forward with great caution, as if approaching an open flame, and gently placed our fingers on the bottom left corner of the Emancipation Proclamation. Neither of us could believe our luck at the
experience we had both just shared. Following this, the registrar then placed the cover back on the box and returned it to the cabinet from which it came.

This personal experience with the Emancipation Proclamation was an enjoyable and memorable event as both a historian and visitor. The opportunity to view this document up close and personal was in a sense a culmination of the many years spent learning about its creation, presentation, and impact on millions of Americans since 1863. My individual research and understanding of the Emancipation Proclamation’s significance made this experience that more meaningful in that it helped me to appreciate and acknowledge a piece of living history. This information was shaped and developed by former professors, readings, lectures, and films, none of which ever really contradicted one another. I learned that President Lincoln presented his idea for this document as far back as July of 1862, with a preliminary draft created months later on September 22 shortly after the Union’s victory at the Battle of Antietam. I was also aware of its official announcement on January 1, 1863, and the many similar reactions and responses that rippled throughout the country at the time. I have always understood the document as significant not only for its impact on the conduct of the war but because it laid the groundwork for the creation of the Thirteenth Amendment.

Yet, others may have a far different understanding or recollection of what this text truly means. Competing information can be found in lecture halls and discussion groups throughout the country. These contradicting ideas therefore lead to varied views of past events. This situation is made even more complex by individuals and groups who consciously misconstrue events, and memories while omitting others in an effort to distort factual historical accounts. Historian Michael Kammen describes this process as the “blurring of specific historical memories into mythical sagas.”1 With the prospect for distortion of information so readily available, how then can we, as an audience, trust the information presented by local museums and organizations to be entirely accurate? What type of presentation should we expect from local and national museums?

This thesis explores these questions and others associated with the forms in which the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation are commemorated, celebrated, and remembered in Tallahassee. It will also discuss the National Archives

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and Records Administration’s approach to formulate an exhibit focusing on the Civil War, thereby offering a national and “official” perspective.

**Tallahassee: The Antebellum Period through the Civil War**

In the years leading up to the Civil War, Tallahassee prospered through the use of a well developed system of slave labor. By 1860, it was recognized as the largest town in Leon County and served as the capital of Florida. According to the census its population was 1,932.\(^2\) Of this number, African Americans comprised seventy-three percent of Leon County’s total population.\(^3\) County residents differed from the rest of the state, where few owned slaves.\(^4\) Larry Rivers summarized the contrast as such: “the typical Leon County citizen, unlike the majority of Southerners, [was] a slaveholder.”\(^5\) The plantation system in Leon County translated into power. According to historian, John E. Johns, it served as “the principal economy and thus provided the dominant political and social leadership of the state.”\(^6\)

The great majority of the slave population served as labor in the rural, agricultural landscape of this area. The area’s rich soil attracted slaveholders and their extended families.\(^7\) For example, Edward Bradford, a prominent slaveholding physician, owned separate plantations in the county and was married to Martha Branch, daughter of another prominent slaveholding family. Another major planter, Robert W. Williams, who was a cousin to the Branches, possessed a plantation that spanned 5,100 acres and was worked by 196 slaves. Williams also “operated one of six sawmills in Leon [sic] primarily managed by slaves.”\(^8\) Aside from plantations, slaves could be found working in grist mills, saw mills, shingle mills, and brickyards, and “functioning as blacksmiths, carpenters, coopers, and wheelwrights.”\(^9\) Records and newspaper accounts detail the outsourcing of some slaves by their owners to one of the largest companies at the time,

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\(^2\) Larry E. Rivers, “Leon County Slaves were Investments,” *Capitol Outlook*, February 20-26, 1992, 3.
\(^4\) John E. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1963), 141.
\(^6\) Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 140.
\(^8\) Rivers, “Leon County Slaves were Investments,” 1.
\(^9\) Ibid, 1.
the Tallahassee Railroad Company from about 1832 until the beginning of the Civil War. Thus the contributions of slaves towards the economic survival of Tallahassee are undeniable. The institution of slavery served as the backbone of Tallahassee’s cultural, social, and economic being prior to the Civil War.

On January 10, 1861, delegates from Florida’s General Assembly convened in Tallahassee, the state’s capital, to vote on the issue of secession from the United States of America. Tallahassians crowded the capitol halls in a heightened state of excitement as the details for secession were formulated in an effort to declare itself as a sovereign and independent nation.” Having been granted statehood only fifteen years prior, Florida voted to follow in the steps of two other southern states, South Carolina, and Mississippi. This made Florida the third state in the union to secede well before Abraham Lincoln was scheduled to take office in March. Shortly after the Republican candidate’s victory in the November 1860 election, many ‘hard-line states’ rights advocates [feared that their] interests were at risk,” Florida was no exception. During this time, the idea of secession was heavily supported by wealthy white farmers and landowners primarily located in middle Florida, which included Leon County. They sponsored “public rallies supporting secession [that] were held all throughout the state.” These supporters were thus excited to learn that delegates voted sixty-two to seven in favor of secession. The vote however, left a few local residents in a state of shock and sadness. Some Tallahassians gathered together in hopes of stalling the Order of Secession in the hours leading up to its’ formal signing. This event, held by Richard Keith Call, attracted “three to four hundred people, whose heart beat time to the Music of the Union.”

The signing of the Ordinance of Secession was carried out on the front steps of the capitol’s east portico, thus creating a public event witnessed by hundreds of people. The celebrations continued later that evening with a torch light parade, shooting of

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10 Ibid, 3.
11 Johns, Florida During the Civil War, 19.
13 Museum of Florida History, Florida in the Civil War, R.A. Gray Building, 500 South Bronough Street Tallahassee, FL 32399, November 17, 2008.
15 Johns, Florida During the Civil War, 20.
16 Ibid, 20.
fireworks, ringing of church bells, and speeches. Princess Catherine Murat’s ceremonious firing of the city’s cannon was the final celebratory act of the evening’s festivities. The events of this day propelled Florida into what many considered as a confrontation of last resort, but a necessary form of action to protect the state’s interests. The American Civil War gripped the nation for the next four years and is debatably the most remembered, discussed, and commemorated war in the state of Florida.

**Commemorating Competing Memories**

Central to the discussion in which a community such as Tallahassee and its citizens choose to commemorate the Civil War are competing forms of public, versus private memory. Historian John Bodnar describes public memory as “a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future.” It is the merging “of official and vernacular cultural expression.” Here, the term official, refers to “cultural leaders or authorities at all levels of society [who] share a common interest in social unity, the continuity of existing institutions, and loyalty to the status quo.” Together, they strive to “promote interpretations of past and present reality that reduce the power of competing interests that threaten the attainment of their goals.” In terms of war and national conflict, these forms of commemoration advance the feelings of patriotism versus those of sorrow and grief. By contrast, vernacular culture is susceptible to change and is concerned with “conveying what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like.” Thus as Bodnar states the major focus of public memorials rests “not [in] the past, but serious matters in the present such as the nature of power,” in reference to those individuals and groups presenting official forms of memory, and the question of loyalty, that calls for

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18 Ibid, 15.
21 Ibid, 13.
22 Ibid, 14.
23 Ibid, 14.
an analysis as to how well they represent and merge together both official and vernacular cultures.\textsuperscript{24}

In order to further understand Tallahassee’s competing memories, there arises a need to question who is doing the commemorating and why. One must also identify the historical events being remembered and how they are presented. Does a collective memory exist within Tallahassee or are there competing memories such as black vs. white, war vs. emancipation, private vs. public, the lost cause vs. one of ignorance? Evidence suggests that a form of each of these comparisons is present throughout Florida’s capital. Permanent museum exhibits such as those found at the Museum of Florida History and the Capitol History Museum focus on the capital’s role during the war, in terms of politics, military movements, cultural and societal activities within the city. By contrast, Emancipation Day is commemorated by two different organizations on May 20\textsuperscript{th} of each year in an effort to celebrate the day in which thousands of slaves had their freedom confirmed. In even further contrast, one of the most prominent memorials erected to honor Civil War veterans and their sacrifices in battles near Tallahassee is located downtown on the front lawn of the Old Historic State Capitol Building. By studying these celebrations and memorials, this thesis will explore the issue of how history influences public memory of Florida’s involvement in the Civil War. It will also assist in identifying the purpose of these public types of observances, the function they serve in the community, and the extent to which we allow private memory to dictate how and what we commemorate.

Understanding the role of memory is thus critical for this study, “for memory can, to quote historian Edward Ayers, ‘divide as much as unite…Memory makes the cultural political, the political cultural; memory makes present conflicts revolve around questions about the past.’”\textsuperscript{25} Historical research may provide the facts and figures necessary to understand how, when, and where these events took place, however many more difficult and complex questions concerning remembrance remain unanswered. Public historians and citizens have attempted to forge an overall acceptable collective memory. In the case of Tallahassee, what is needed is an understanding of the ways in which the

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 15.
For centuries, nations have looked to their pasts to answer questions and seek guidance. According to John Bodnar, a society must understand its past and present in order to understand their implications upon its future. He further argues that people search for these answers in local and national monuments, public festivals, museum exhibits, and memorials. Memories relating to large national events, such as the Civil War continue to evolve long after those who experienced it firsthand have passed away. By some accounts the passage of time has proven to be increasingly detrimental to the study of the Civil War for it allows the opportunity to misrepresent facts and memories. Still, the uncovering of new information that may not have been available before can assist in forming new ideas and views that may have not been previously considered. And while “many scholars note that ‘getting the past right' is not one of the primary functions of public memory,” accuracy must still remain at the forefront of any commemoration or memorial for it is a clear reflection of what our society values and is consequently a reflection upon our character and as a people at large.

The Museum of Florida History’s exhibit, *Florida in the Civil War*, is a clear example of official memory in action. One would anticipate and believe it highly appropriate for this branch of the Florida Department of State to memorialize and educate its citizens about Florida’s involvement in the Civil War. Where else would one expect to gather a quick “history lesson” about the war, its effects, the events that occurred within state borders, and the state’s contributions to the Confederate cause? Being in that the exhibit is funded by state dollars and located in the capital city, would suggest that Florida in the Civil War is an official representation of all that is indeed central and significant to the study of Florida’s involvement during the war. This is undoubtedly the most crucial role of this exhibit, for it must attempt to display all aspects and occurrences as dictated by historical facts. Thus, curators are faced with a twofold

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dilemma in that willingly or not, they are turning what they believe to be a vernacular memory into official memory. At the same time they must attempt to remain as accurate and as true to the records as possible. In doing so, they allow history a life onto its own, in a way that should spawn new ideas or actions on the part of its visitors allowing them to apply these meanings to their present lives. After all, is this not the sole purpose for any and all public memorials? Exhibits, memorials and monuments are more than objects to admire or appropriate places for reflection, they exist to spur thoughts, emotions, meanings, and to ask ourselves about the part we are expected to play in conveying this memory to future generations.

The National Archives and Records Administration's *Discovering the Civil War* provides an example of yet another way in which public memory is created, one that is dependent upon its "official" records to share the story of our nation’s deadliest battle. Here, visitors take a very different approach to history one that is more in keeping with David Lowenthal’s belief that the “prime function of memory is not to preserve the past but to adapt it so as to enrich and manipulate the present.”28 Visitors are invited and expected to literally handle objects and manipulate them in a sense to discover their true meaning. While curators may attempt in their best efforts to refrain from imposing any type of meaning or suggestion, whether insinuated or not, they have already done so in their selecting of which documents to display. A collective memory was, in a sense, inferred when curators sifted through millions of pieces of material in search of records they believed would represent a particular gallery theme and also be of great interest to ordinary citizens. The idea behind this exhibit, is to engage the visitor enough to prompt a second, third, or fourth, return to the Archives in hopes that he/she will perform research that is relevant to their own needs; perhaps even leading to a desire to further enhance a vernacular memory. Although *Discovering the Civil War* appears to adhere to John Bodnar’s belief that “usually it is the local and personal past that is incorporated into a nationalized public memory rather than the other way around,” I would argue that in terms of Tallahassee, some of the “local, regional, class,

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and ethnic interests are sustained in one form or another..., but [that their] dominant meaning is usually [not] nationalistic.”

Included in this discussion are the competing official and vernacular memories present in the Tallahassee community dating as far back as the closing of the Civil War. A closer look at commemorations throughout the city forces one to question if a part of the vernacular memory of blacks differs significantly from that of some whites? Yet, another often overlooked dynamic is the difference in opinion and memory within the white community that identify significantly different beliefs relating to past events. The problem for the public historian is when one vernacular memory is used to present a distorted history. For example, although extensive research proves the historical importance of slavery in Tallahassee and Leon county, it somehow remains ignored and completely untouched by Springtime Tallahassee, an organization whose yearly event in celebration of the city claims to represent the period of Civil War and Reconstruction from 1861-1901 through the use of floats within a parade. Here, emphasis is placed on the ways in which local residents fought “to survive the collapse of the plantations, the lack of workers to work the farms and the declining agricultural economy,” including “the agricultural societies and fairs [sic] formed [sic]” in an effort to stimulate those same industries.  The existence of another representative group by this same organization entitled, “Antebellum Statehood Krewe 1845-1860” blatantly fails to mention slavery in its entire description. How is it possible to not only describe but publicly present these important periods of history and yet fail to mention the contributions of its one time largest population? This misrepresentation of history has continued to exist for forty-one years in Tallahassee. This singular display of pageantry appears to reflect familiar ideals about the “Old South about the chivalry, and romance of antebellum plantation life, about black servants and a happy, loyal, slave culture, remembered as a source of

29 Bodnar, Remaking America, 17.
laughter, music, and contentment."\(^{31}\) This romanticized image of the south was made quite popular by Lost Cause writers, such as Thomas Nelson Page and Sara Pryor.\(^{32}\)

Michael Kammen describes the national memory of the Civil War as "interplay of such human factors as inertia and indifference, pride and vindictiveness, honor and shame, all of which contribute to one degree or another towards our understanding of the Civil War."\(^{33}\) The majority of Tallahassians supported the state's decision to secede, however the history of secession is downplayed today in favor of a story about its soldiers and the community's contributions during the war. Kammen's description of how honor and shame shape public memory also holds true in terms of the way in which Tallahassee buried soldiers. Old City Cemetery located between Call Street and Park Avenue, served as the city's public burial space and was divided by race. Confederate soldiers were laid to rest in the northeast portion of the cemetery. African American Union soldiers who died at the Battle of Natural Bridge were buried in the southwest.\(^{34}\) These tombstones could help current residents and visitors understand competing memories. The graves continue to receive wreaths of honor but they exist in a setting that forces the visitor to grapple with the shame of slavery and segregation.

The greatest competition for official memory in terms of commemoration is that of a personal private memory. Eric Gable and Richard Handler describe "memory" as the layperson's accounting of a personally experienced event that historians may or may not come to consider 'historical'.\(^{35}\) However, one should not be so quick to discredit private memories of significant events or experiences on the part of ordinary citizens. Often they may very well be the only source of primary information available when other sources such as newspaper accounts, letters, and photographs are unavailable. These experiences can be deemed historical and should therefore be verified through comparison with other individual's memories, oral histories, letters, and diaries.

Whether or not these memories are historical to the community is an entirely separate matter. Some might argue that the responsibility of commemoration and


\(^{32}\) Ibid, 103.

\(^{33}\) Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 101.


remembrance lays entirely at the discretion of public historians. But these professionals are always faced with the dilemma of whether they have allowed too little or too many individuals and organizations to dictate how and what should be designated as a society’s official memory. Problems with competing memories arise when the personal agendas of different groups attempt to elevate their interpretations instead of compromising their agendas to provide the most accurate historical account possible, or in some cases it may even be attributed to an absolute refusal to recognize that their version may be ahistorical. By contrast, allowing too few to participate in the process allows for the possibility of ignoring relevant pieces of history and thus providing a skewed perspective of past events.

In many cases, the historical perspective represented may be from a dominant group whose power and influence is biased and not necessarily in keeping with the truth. According to Paul A. Shackel, the “subaltern group has a choice. It can subscribe to the dominant interpretation, ignore the dominant view, or fight for representation in the public memory.”36 The latter is the best and most effective option available to represent a more accurate history of events and one whose record of utilization has encountered various forms of success.

One must ask, for instance, whether African Americans made a conscious effort to secure their vernacular memory early on in Tallahassee in hosting Emancipation Day celebrations since its city-wide announcement in 1865. Was this in opposition to southern organizations led by white women who viewed themselves “as the guiding spirit and primary keepers of heritage and public history”?37 Or were they simply following in their footsteps in terms of representing their own agendas? Frederick Douglass “viewed emancipation as the central reference point of black history...he believed it ought to be a national celebration in which all blacks, the low and the mighty, could claim a new and secure social identity.”38 Questioning local commemorations of Emancipation is therefore directly related to the ways in which Tallahassee’s history has been re-written since its days as an antebellum capital. Namely, the exclusion of black

38 Blight, Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War, 94.
history in larger societal functions, not just in public schools, but in it being overlooked and disregarded in better and more recognized events held throughout the city.

This thesis asks whether the celebrations, memorials, and commemorations within Tallahassee present a clear, accurate and universal recollection of the city’s participation in the Civil War, or are they simply portraying an agreeable and pleasant past of which its citizens can rejoice and be proud? The evidence suggests that at this time, official celebrations in Tallahassee do not represent an accurate portrayal of the events leading up to and during this conflict. Understandably, a collective memory is difficult to achieve due in part to the differing perceptions and long-held personal accounts of historical events by the general public, a situation that is further compounded when communities attempt to commemorate those same events on a local scale. In the case of Tallahassee, the city’s inability to recognize a need for change allows for the views currently in place to continue to represent a city and its history, with a distorted, inaccurate, and limited examination of its past. The fear of presenting a more inclusive account may stem from each group feeling as though they are relinquishing power of a deeply held memory, thereby opening the floor to opposing memories they each may wish to suppress. They are each keenly aware that “those who control the past have the ability to command social and political events in the present and the future.” However, control by either group is a complete disservice to those individuals black and white who sacrificed their very existence for the sake of their family and beliefs.

Events, memorials, historical markers, and commemorations relating to the Civil War are some of the best and most often employed methods by public historians to honor significant people and controversial events. Often, they are the only forms in which ordinary folk gather and increase their historical knowledge outside of a formal educational setting. Thus, it is crucial that we as historians keep a watchful eye and institute a system of continual evaluation and self-criticism so as to not only present information as accurately as possible, but also to maintain a high level of credibility among the community. These types of public memory are especially vulnerable to manipulation by those who may consciously attempt to distort history. According to

39 Shackel, Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape, 3.
David Blight, “the historical memory of any transforming or controversial event emerges from cultural and political competition, from the choice to confront the past and to debate and manipulate its meaning.”

An assessment of the memorials and commemorations throughout Tallahassee does not suggest a strong and deliberate attempt to manipulate the war and its impact. However, the city appears to reach for any piece of historical memory that will give meaning and significance to Tallahassee’s involvement and contributions during the war. And while all they help add depth to the events occurring in and around Tallahassee during that time, they are biased in the sense that they do not offer any reference or even seek to identify the citizens, freed black men, and runaway slaves who fought for the Union cause. There is no mention of the food rationing that gripped the county and the need to change from cotton to food production as early as 1861. Also omitted in local exhibits is Leon County’s past as the largest slave holding county in the state prior to the Civil War. The relationship between planter and slave are ignored, so too is the state’s all important responsibility in cultivating and producing food in response to the changing and worsening conditions for the Confederate States of America. Greater emphasis is placed on the Battle of Natural Bridge in which residents from Tallahassee assisted in defending the city from approaching Union forces. For many, this skirmish is little if at all known outside of state lines. Together, all of this may very well imply a distortion of the meaning and the ideological bases of the war, which for many is still a topic of debate.

Public historians are influenced by many conflicting factors. Their role is to educate so much as it is to remember what we know of our nation’s past. The struggle lies as much in the memory of history as it does in figuring out which pieces of history are best suited to share with the public to create a more thorough and complete understanding of events that transpired so long ago. In writing the history of Tallahassee and the Civil War, public historians must consider numerous perspectives. For example, the women and children present on the home front formed a very different view of the war than soldiers on the battlefield; by the same token an African American slave working on a plantation in Tallahassee would have a different account of the war.

40 Blight, Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War, 96.
than the hundreds of escaped slaves and free blacks from other counties who joined the Union Army in the conflict’s remaining two years. Many of the spouses left behind to manage the family farm and raise large families did not have time to document the events going on around them. African American slaves were also prohibited from learning to read and write and therefore were left to rely in large part to oral history as a form of remembrance and documentation. In sum, all of these perspectives are important in developing a public memory of the Civil War.

**Why Tallahassee: Florida’s Official Memory**

A great number of historians dismiss Florida’s role and contributions towards the Confederate States of America as minimal at best; others find its capital even less noteworthy and irrelevant to the larger study of the Civil War. Three of the more popular events known to have occurred within the state are the accounts of Union forces engaged in battle with the Confederate army in Marianna, the Battle of Natural Bridge, and the Battle of Olustee near present-day Lake City. Scholars recognize these movements by Union troops as attempts to reach the state capital, though all proved to be unsuccessful. Thus, while significant to the state’s history, none of these events actually took place within Tallahassee. Still, their memory and prominence can be found in exhibits and memorials located in the state’s capital.

Soon after the end of Civil War, Tallahassee acted like many other major southern cities. The need to identify, memorialize and commemorate individuals and events related to the war inspired communities to erect statues, markers, and to host yearly celebrations. Monuments and commemorations are a reflection on the history and ideals valued most by a community. Their role is of a much greater importance, for their significance is an interpretation of historical events for future generations. It is therefore important to question not only the meaning behind a monument or celebration but the purpose it serves to the community in general.

Celebrations and exhibits hosted throughout Tallahassee commemorating its involvement in the Civil War include those hosted by the Knott House Museum and the Museum of Florida History, both Florida Department of State institutions, and the Old
Capitol Museum operated by the Florida Legislative Research Center and Museum. Separate communities within the city have also commemorated the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation since 1866. Historical accounts, oral histories, newspaper articles, and photographs all describe activities, events, and the individuals responsible for leading these celebrations. Although many communities throughout the United States commemorate a similar event, known as Juneteenth, Tallahassee has chosen to memorialize their learning of this document on May 20th of each year. The largest of these events is the “The African American Heritage Festival in Celebration of Emancipation Day.” It has been known to attract as many as 7,000-8000 people. Since 1977, this week long festival has been hosted by the John Walker Ford Center, an organization belonging to the City of Tallahassee’s Parks and Recreation Department.41

Thus the focus of this research is intended to further contribute to the study of the relationship between the Civil War and memory in Tallahassee in order to form a greater understanding of what is being remembered and how. As the capital of Florida, Tallahassee was the site of the signing of the Order of Secession. Secondly, it is home to the Florida State Archives, an agency who functions as the official “keepers” of all Florida Government related documents. Lastly, it serves as the headquarters to three state funded museums that have chosen to represent differing aspects of the War. For these reasons, Tallahassee and the following displays of commemoration by these institutions will help to formulate what can be referred to as Florida’s official memory.

41 Joe Thomas (Director of John Walker Ford Center), in discussion with the author, November 25, 2008.
CHAPTER ONE: SLAVERY, CIVIL WAR, AND COMMEMORATION

As is the case with any form of historical research, it is necessary to gain a fresh perspective about what is already known in order to identify areas that are in need of further investigation. In terms of the Civil War, there exists a wealth of information available detailing the various forms of contested memory and its effect on our culture, society, and political landscape. To some degree this subject matter can be considered a topic whose study may appear fully exhausted beyond all reason, however, because of the ever changing social and political atmosphere, it remains a topic that continues to intrigue historians and researchers, thus affording it unending recognition. As the United States changes, develops, and re-invents itself, so too is the need to approach the past with new questions, ideas, concerns, and theories. This is true of every major war ever fought by the United States, from the American Revolution to Vietnam and someday in the not so distant future it will also include studies of the present wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The desire to strengthen our understanding and make sense of the past will never cease as long as man is able to read, write and remember.

Before offering a critique of the public memorials and commemorations dedicated to the memory of the Civil War throughout Tallahassee, it is necessary to gain a clear understanding of the events leading up to the war including the political and social atmosphere during this period. Therefore, a large portion of this research is focused on a number of various and interconnected topics that are crucial to Tallahassee and its Civil War memory; including slavery, local battles, and Florida’s contributions to the Confederate cause.

The institution of slavery has for centuries served as a major topic of interest and research for historians interested in its origin, development, and effects in the state of Florida and Tallahassee. As a result of their efforts, they have provided much needed insight into the political and social atmosphere within the state’s capital prior to the war’s commencement. Another major subject area includes research into Florida’s contributions and involvement during the war with particular attention to the events that occurred within the capital city and county. The effects and reactions to Reconstruction in terms of segregation and discrimination are other topics for consideration and analysis for they play a major role in terms of which events are commemorated.
Diaries, oral histories, newspaper accounts and narratives all document the hosting of and participation in Emancipation Day parades, the creation, opening, and reaction to Tallahassee’s *Florida in the Civil War* exhibit, and feelings of insensitivity experienced by some members of society regarding the flying of the Confederate flag on the façade of the state capitol. While there exists a great deal of material and research dedicated to the study of the Civil War in terms of its memory and commemoration, much of the focus is statewide and not necessarily specific to Tallahassee.

**The History of Slavery in Florida**

The state of Florida is home to the first, oldest, permanent, and continually inhabited European settlement in North America. St. Augustine, a city founded in 1565 by Pedro Menendez de Aviles, a Spaniard, is still in existence today. In the midst of the world’s largest slave trade during the sixteenth through the early part of the nineteenth century, St. Augustine remained a haven for runaway slaves and freed black men and women. For centuries, Africans, and African Americans could find comfort and protection in a community that was at the time, unlike any other throughout the south. Spanish settlers continued to abide by “Spanish law and custom[s] [that] afforded slaves rights not systematically found in the Old South or in other slave systems with European origins.” Spanish slavery also differed in its structure by its use of task labor versus one of gang labor. As noted by historian, Larry Eugene Rivers, slave-owners favored the learning of a trade by the enslaved Africans. Meanwhile, free blacks were rewarded with “certain liberties” in return for their active participation in “defend[ing] St. Augustine against [other] hostile European powers” that were also looking to establish their own colonies in the New World.

The establishment of other European colonies, particularly the British, led to increased development of the Florida landscape. In turn, these colonists expanded slavery throughout Florida. According to Rivers “By the time Florida had seceded from

44 Ibid, 3.
the Union the slave population had surpassed sixty-one thousand.” Hence, slavery was deeply rooted in the state’s history from its beginning and continued to influence the state’s social and political atmosphere well into the twenty-first century. Thus slavery’s relevance to the study of Florida, and its memory in terms of commemorations and public displays of remembrance cannot be overstated. Its ties to the Civil War are undeniable, and a comprehensive analysis of its effects in the years following the war’s end may help add to a broader understanding of its recollection in cities such as Tallahassee.

In the book, *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation*, Larry Eugene Rivers guides his readers through a very thorough and extensive account of slavery complete with figures and maps to illustrate the expansion of this institution, the location of large state-wide plantations primarily operated by a system of slave labor, photographs of slaves purchased by prominent well-known citizens throughout the community, run-away slave announcements, advertisements of slaves for sale, and artwork depicting images of slaves interacting with Seminole Indians. Rivers’ exhaustive research spans the period between 1500-1845, however much of the work is focused during the time in which slavery was at its largest point of growth and thus “planting the seeds that would give flower [sic] to an Old South economy and way of life.”

Rivers pays particular attention to the daily lives and activities of slaves, including the role of religion, family life, physical treatment, social interaction between other blacks, whites, and Native Americans, slave resistance movements and their consequences, and the role of slavery in the Civil War. At the heart of the matter is Rivers’ assertion that Florida’s development as a territory and state is largely due to its ties with the institution of slavery. He argues its existence was a catalyst for the inception of the First Seminole War and its expansion into east and middle Florida as a direct result of the Second Seminole War. But what is most inspiring about Rivers’ work is his approach and method of investigation and interpretation of facts. In terms of the Civil War, Rivers’ findings help answer the larger question of the culture and

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46 Ibid, 251.
atmosphere within the capital city and Leon county. Rivers builds his case through a compilation of first person accounts in the form of narratives, oral histories, and diaries, family papers, transcripts, and memoirs. Other supporting documents include newspaper accounts detailing events and occurrences throughout Florida, and various other public and government records, periodicals, journals, and publications. His insight is crucial to this discussion for a limited number of interpretation exists in documenting the day to day activities from the viewpoint of former slaves.

John E. Johns addresses the relationship between planter and slave during wartime in his work, *Florida During the Civil War*. Johns focuses on the state government’s efforts to persuade planters to “reduce their cotton acreage and increase their food production during the spring and summer of 1861.” The end result led to the passage of a legislative act in 1863 strictly outlining the amount of cotton and food production that was expected in relation to the amount of acreage cultivated by each planter. Johns further discusses the difficulties that occurred when many planters and overseers left to fight for the Confederacy. A lack of supervision resulted in the fear of slave insurrections on large plantations, poor harvests, and the disrepair of equipment and farm tools. Slave codes were implemented prior to the Civil War; however, the conflict produced an increase in the enforcement of these laws. These codes prohibited slaves “to be away from the plantation without a pass, trade with other persons without permission, or possess firearms or liquor.” Johns suggest that a very small number of slaves ran away and joined the Union during the four year conflict. For the most part, they did not revolt as feared by many whites. For those who did cross enemy lines, they were known to have assisted the Union cause by serving as “guides for [sic] coastal raiding parties.”

47 John E. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1963), 141.
48 Ibid, 144.
49 Ibid, 145-146.
50 Ibid, 148.
51 Ibid, 152.
**History of Commemoration**

Public memorials and commemorations began to appear on the southern landscape shortly after the end of the war taking shape in the form of grave decorations. One of most common and better known organizations responsible for this activity was the Ladies’ Memorial Association (LMA). Local communities created chapters of the LMA, largely supported by widows of Confederate soldiers. It was the intent of these “women [to celebrate] the sanctity and martyrdom of men” in the form of Confederate monuments.\(^{52}\) Other communities, such as the town of Waterloo, New York, claim to have been the first to create an official “Memorial Day” celebration to honor the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) in 1868.\(^{53}\) This yearly celebration quickly caught on and was thus replicated in thirty-one states the following year.\(^{54}\) Kammen describes these events as featuring parades, veterans, marching bands, memorial services, “yachting and athletic events.”\(^{55}\)

According to historian, James P. Jones, John A. Logan, a former Union General during the American Civil War and a statesman from Illinois, served as a founding member of the G.A.R. and was the individual “most closely identified with Memorial Day.”\(^{56}\) Logan was a central figure in organizing the veteran’s organization and strengthening its political role and interests in the Republican Party. While commander of the Philadelphia chapter, Logan designated May 30\(^{th}\) as Memorial Day under General Order No.11.\(^{57}\) The order called for the “strewing of flowers, or otherwise decorating the graves of Comrades who died in defense of their country in the late rebellion.”\(^{58}\) Although the practice of honoring the Union dead was not new, particularly in the North, Logan’s call for this day of official commemoration was well received, later becoming a legal holiday in 1910.\(^{59}\) The connection between Logan’s G.A.R. affiliation and political

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\(^{52}\) Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003), 24.

\(^{53}\) Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 102.

\(^{54}\) Ibid, 103.

\(^{55}\) Ibid, 103.


\(^{57}\) Ibid, 19.

\(^{58}\) Ibid, 19.

\(^{59}\) Ibid, 19.
aspirations played a role in his success in getting publicizing Memorial Day and for legislation that would benefit veterans in terms of pensions and in their obtaining public lands from local governments among other issues.

This subject is further addressed in the work, *Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G.A.R.*, by Mary Dearing who meticulously describes the founding of the Grand Army of the Republic and its ties to the Radical Republican Party, during the period of Reconstruction. According to the author, there was a connection between the G.A.R.’s Memorial Day activities and its use as propaganda by Republicans. Dearing’s primary focus is on the G.A.R., however, she does include a discussion describing the link between Civil War veterans and including Democrats towards the end of the nineteenth century. Dearing is especially concerned with the political activities of the G.A.R. and the veterans’ national influence on legislation.

Discussion of this subject by historians identifies a sense of competing memories shortly after the inauguration of this holiday. As one may expect, Northern and Southern communities honored individuals whom they each considered worthy of remembrance due to their participation, a partaking that for many resulted in death. For this, families, friends, and communities deemed them significant and deserving of the utmost respect and tribute. In Tallahassee, African Americans honored the memory of Union soldiers killed at the nearby Battle of Natural Bridge with wreaths following Emancipation Day celebrations. Today, this practice continues to thrive through the efforts of the John G. Riley Center/Museum of African American History and Culture.

Another account stemming from the north is that of, William Monroe Trotter, a man who considered ‘President Lincoln [one of] the greatest character[s] in the Civil War.’ Trotter helped sponsor, and was at times the main force behind affairs in Boston that honored among others Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Charles Sumner, and John Brown. “These memorials, usually [consisted] of speeches at Faneuil Hall, honoring the dead and [reminding] the living of the support white men had once given to black protest.” Still other communities honored specific political and military leaders. Events marking Jefferson Davis’ birthday on June 3rd were converted

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61 Ibid, 97-98.
into official Memorial Day celebrations.\textsuperscript{62} Yearly ceremonies also recognized General Stonewall Jackson’s death on May 10, 1863 and General Joseph E. Johnston’s surrender on April 26, 1865, as cause for remembrance and homage.

The erection of monuments commemorating Confederate armies and noteworthy battles became commonplace throughout the South. Historians studying cultural and ethnic history at the end of the nineteenth century explore the reasoning and purpose behind these memorials and events in northern and southern states.\textsuperscript{63} Case studies of specific city and state celebrations serve as prime examples of successful and sometimes controversial presentations. These accounts contribute to the greater understanding of memory and allow public historians to compare their different approaches and how they are received by the general public. Aside from this, they afford critics the opportunity to form various opinions regarding the motives behind markers, ceremonies, and memorials celebrating various aspects of the Civil War. Paul A. Shackel argues that a desire to justify slavery and secession from the Union coupled with a new outlook “at the war years as a glorious and heroic era” was the driving force behind many of the monuments erected shortly after the end of the war.\textsuperscript{64} Furthermore, Shackel connects these actions to the rise of a sentiment known as the Lost Cause: “journalists and fiction writers from the die-hard Confederate apologists and novelists who believed that the South fought for a just cause and lost only because it succumbed to overwhelming numbers.”\textsuperscript{65} Together, these examples contribute in some form to the question of how the Civil War is commemorated in competing ways in American culture.

Competing official and vernacular memories are just as common now as they were in 1866 and yet the answer of how to best address this century-long issue remains problematic. Some historians argue for a complete comprehensive representation of the Civil War that is all inclusive representing both official and vernacular viewpoints, while others believe discriminatory and inaccurate portrayals of the war speak volumes.

\textsuperscript{62} Shackel, Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape, 24.
\textsuperscript{64} Shackel, Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape, 27.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 27.
to the mindset and beliefs of past and present communities.\textsuperscript{66} Still, a third proposal suggests the “[creation of] a broader panorama, offering not one perspective but three: those of the Union, the Confederacy, and the African Americans.”\textsuperscript{67} Theoretically the true issue may lie not only in our memory but of our viewpoint on the war altogether. It is possible to suggest that the memory of the Civil War depends on whether we view the Civil War as “the apocalyptic end of a roseate past or the bloody beginning of a promising future.”\textsuperscript{68}

Historians hope to offer a greater understanding of this much debated topic in response to the millions of state and national park visitors, museum audiences, and local community members who question the presentation and memory of this war. Many historians are also aware of the ongoing division of memory between southern heritage groups looking to strengthen feelings of southern pride and African Americans fighting to share their perspective on the causes and effects of slavery and the war.

Herein lies an issue of debate in regards to public sponsored memorials, a topic addressed by Sanford Levinson’s book, \textit{Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies}. Levinson argues that it is a government’s responsibility to accurately portray a historical event to the general public audience. This standard should therefore apply to government sponsored museums and public historians when dealing with competing memories. They must take into account this dilemma with the understanding that views and perceptions about war are constantly changing, and that historical sites, museums, plaques, markers and especially monuments are not immune to this same change. For Levinson, the problem of deciding where and what type of a monument should be erected is second only to the debate of what the monument is intended to represent and in what type of context. Historians should be sensitive to the fact that what many may consider a positive memorial or exhibit, may actually be regarded as offensive and oppressive by another. An example of this is described in the displaying of the Confederate flag over the state capitals of South Carolina and Georgia. Levinson argues that “there are simultaneously present at least two

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
determinate meanings of the flag-as-symbol-of-slavery and the flag-as-symbol-of-
Southern-culture (independent of slavery)-and-local-autonomy."

The study and understanding of history cannot be of much use in regards to
preparing for the future, if one fails to evaluate or chooses to blatantly ignore those dark
and at times painful events that have transpired over the course of the nation’s two-
hundred thirty-one year history. As Levinson argues, tearing down insensitive
monuments, is not always the best means to create a better understanding of the past.
Instead, as an alternative to contested views, communities can attempt to correct
insensitive forms of public historical memorials by re-phrasing, re-locating, or through
the addition of another monument or memorial in order to add equal balance of opinion.
Public historians, government and community leaders, and curators must take a stand,
come to a consensus, preferably with public input, and move away from a neutral state
on such important matters as how to represent a nation’s history.

Florida’s Participation in the Civil War

The study of the Civil War is as complex as the titles used to reference this great
conflict. For some, it is known as The War of Northern Aggression, The War Between
the States, The War of the Rebellion, and not surprisingly, The Lost Cause. Depending
upon where one may reside within the United States is another factor in determining the
type of information discussed, to include differing political viewpoints, the amount of
emphasis placed on particular topics, and how those same issues are portrayed. In
regards to Florida, historians such as William Watson Davis and Larry E. Rivers
contribute to our understanding of the state’s participation in the Civil War, while others
such as James McPherson provide a more national and comprehensive view. Each of
these works fulfills the desire by students and researchers to answer historical
questions about the state’s less discussed and often ignored involvement.

James McPherson’s single volume work, Battle Cry of Freedom, offers a detailed
description of every major battle fought during the war. McPherson draws upon diaries,
letters, autobiographies, newspaper articles, state and federal government documents,

reports, Senate papers, photographs, charts, and hundreds of other primary and secondary sources to identify key players and their strategies, tactics, and motives in political and military engagements. He is also careful to not overlook the deeper social issues leading to the war including party affiliations, voting records, and the role of slavery. This exhaustive work clearly identifies northern and southern social and political pressures leading up to the war, the changing of strategies throughout the conflict by both sides, and a thorough discussion regarding the creation, editing, and the eventual enacting of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln.

Florida’s participation in the Civil War is well documented in thousands of journal articles, newspaper accounts, oral histories, museum exhibits, diary entries, letters, government records and books. Yet, the state’s contributions to the war continue to incite minimal discussion outside of state boundaries, and may very well be overlooked if not for the efforts of historians, educators, historical organizations and state agencies. Still, Florida’s involvement and connection to the Confederate cause is not solely limited to the Battle of Olustee or the Union blockade in Pensacola. William Watson Davis cites that “more than 16,000 of its citizens had gone to war” with approximately 15,000 serving in the Confederate Army, of which 6,700 fought for the entire duration “until disabled or killed” and having fought in every major battle.70 More so, both South Carolina and Georgia were also known to have looked to Florida for its cattle production in their desperate need to fight off hunger as early as 1863.71 Social historians have also focused on the changing attitude and life of women and blacks. With their men off at war, women found themselves thrust into duties they were unfamiliar with, though hundreds if not thousands were able to successfully operate large family plantations, and businesses, all while completing their more usual household duties.72 Thus, the argument by many Florida historians is clear, that while major battles were fought on the soil of other surrounding states, towards the end of the war Confederate battalions depended upon food and supplies from Florida.

71 Ibid, 269.
For those studying Florida in the Civil War a unique underlying theme is the link between the antebellum period, political activities, and the specific contributions by Florida to the cause of the Confederacy. Women and children were especially affected by the war in terms of shortages in food, clothing, and medicine. Almost immediately, sewing societies provided an outlet for women to learn the trade of spinning “cotton or wool into knitting yarn,” a forum to develop friendships with other military wives and daughters, and opportunity to display patriotic support.\(^7\) The blockade forced many women to go without both luxury items and items of necessity, forcing them to develop or modify or fashion new dresses, hats, and shoes from local available materials.\(^7\) Christmas proved to be an especially difficult time for families. Slaves, who were accustomed to receiving calico cloth, received nothing during the war years. Mothers fashioned dolls and stuffed animals for their children, and attempted to keep a festive mood through their creations of self-made decorations.\(^7\) Special drives were also held in an effort to raise food, clothing, and money for soldiers. In Tallahassee, the Soldier’s Friend Society raised food to “supplement the diet of wounded soldiers” in the hospital.\(^7\) These same aid societies also provided popular outlets for the entertainment of soldiers and the community. They consisted of minstrel shows, dances, musical concerts, plays, fairs, and festivals.

Schools and churches were also greatly affected by the breakout of war. Schools struggled to remain open due to a lack of funding and a shortage of teachers. Early on, “the legislature used [sic] funds to purchase arms for the state” using school funds thereby causing a disruption in the education of children. “In most localities the schools were casualties of war by the end of 1862.”\(^7\) Prayers of support for the Confederacy were offered by local churches, though these institutions also suffered from a drop in membership and funding, and a shortage of pastors.\(^7\)

For the residents of Florida, the Civil War dramatically changed their way of life. Thousands of husbands and sons, far away from home for the first time, found it difficult

\(^7\) Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 171.
\(^7\) Ibid, 141.
\(^7\) Ibid, 177.
\(^7\) Ibid, 177.
\(^7\) Ibid, 172.
\(^7\) Ibid, 179.
\(^7\) Ibid, 187.
to adjust to a military environment while others approached the opportunity for open battle with courage and patriotism. For the women and children left behind, every effort was made to support these soldiers through rationing, improvisation, and the undertaking of tasks and responsibilities not usually reserved for females. The contributions made by Floridians and the struggles they endured are vastly recorded and contribute to the greater understanding of the events occurring at home and on the battlefield.

Thus, while not strategically significant, the Civil War impacted the local life for thousands of Floridians. Routine, daily activities were altered in support of the war effort. Slaves and non-slaves would soon experience a life many found unimaginable prior to the outbreak of the war. Furthermore, the social, political, and economic changes give credit to the degree of Florida’s contributions and involvement in the conflict. Historians continue to address these issues in their efforts to produce new thoughts, theories, and conclusions. This historiography serves as the foundation and catalyst for further research into areas that lack investigation, interpretation, or a clear understanding. All of which can also effect present and future forms of commemoration. The relationship between history and the memorials that represent specific aspects of it, will forever continue to evolve through continual study and scholarship and should therefore never be expected to remain static. Together, these findings will affect how we, as historians, view and apply new information with what we already know to be true in regards to the critiquing old memorials and the creation of new ones.
CHAPTER TWO: A NATIONAL STORY ONE HUNDRED-FIFTEEN YEARS IN THE MAKING

As this nation approaches the one-hundredth and fiftieth anniversary of the start of the Civil War in 2011, many citizens, historians, museums, and historical institutions are fixated on how best to commemorate the occasion. New ideas and fresh outlooks are at the forefront of many planning committee’s agendas, both on a national and local level. But what effect, if any, do these national commemorations such as the forthcoming National Archives exhibit, Discovering the Civil War, have on exhibits of a much smaller scale? On the one hand, the National Archives is showcasing a number of documents, many of them never before exhibited. Its main focus is to draw the audience towards the information provided by the record itself and thereby force viewers to draw their own conclusions. According to exhibit’s Viewbook, this production is not meant to be an all inclusive rendering of the Civil War, nor is it a chronology of the events as they progressed over the course of four years. The production is in a sense twofold. First, – the visitor will have the opportunity to “discover” information from a variety of records never before displayed. Second, – the National Archives will provide audiences with the tools to continue their investigations of the war after their visit to the exhibit. The goal of the National Archives and its partner, the Foundation for the National Archives is to

Create a 6,000 square foot exhibition that builds on the successful model of our award-wining Public Vaults exhibition in combining displays of original Documents, immersive environments and interactive exhibits to achieve maximum effect. We do not expect to tell a comprehensive and definitive history of the Civil War. We do expect to open visitor’s eyes to a Civil War that is still being explored, and by inference, to a national history that continues to offer great riches to those with a passion for uncovering

79The Foundation for the National Archives, “Brainstorming Session,” (Minutes from meeting regarding Discovering the Civil War in author’s possession, National Archives I, Washington D.C., June 4, 2008).
mysteries. Our goal is not to provide all the answers, but rather we seek to help the visitor ask the question.\textsuperscript{80}

Before launching further into the discussion of the National Archives’ exhibit, one must take a step back to fully identify this institution’s role within the framework of the federal government. As the nation’s largest archival repository and keeper of the nation’s official history, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is responsible for collecting, preserving, and making available for research the records, documents, and materials created by or for the federal government. Many of these records document important events in the history of the United States dating as far back as the country’s founding and come from all three branches of the federal government – legislative, executive, and judicial.\textsuperscript{81} NARA was established in 1934 by an act of Congress in response to a need for a uniformed set of guidelines and procedures concerning the handling of these documents. Prior to this, individual government agencies were responsible for the preservation and disposal of their own records, however, many of these records were mishandled, lost, or disposed of as a result of untrained personnel. As a presidential appointee, the Archivist of the United States serves as the chief administrator of the agency and is responsible for its overall operation and promotion, to include fostering relationships with other archival and historical organizations, and the administering of the agency’s mission and goals.

Aside from its main archival repository located in Washington D.C., NARA also consists of thirty-seven nation-wide archival research facilities, including the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis and fourteen Presidential Libraries. NARA’s most recognized and treasured records known as “The Charters of Freedom” are located within what is known as the Rotunda, where they have been on display since 1952. These three documents consist of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights. Over the years, millions have visited the National Archives to see these documents, however, many left unaware of

\textsuperscript{80} The Foundation for the National Archives, Discovering the Civil War (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, [2008?]).

\textsuperscript{81} National Archives and Records Administration, “About the National Archives,” National Archives and Records Administration, \url{http://www.archives.gov/about/info/whats-an-archives.html} (accessed October 28, 2008).
NARA’s mission. NARA created a new project, The National Archives Experience, in an effort to remedy this. *The Public Vaults*, installed in November 2004, is a permanent exhibit and a major component of this project that strives to educate its visitors about its holdings and what they can learn from them. This interactive exhibit allows access to records in the form of touch-screens, video, audio, and facsimiles in order to explore “treaties, patent applications, acts of Congress, and Supreme Court decisions that changed the course of history.”

The National Archives Experience has most recently decided to build-upon the success of *The Public Vaults* by incorporating similar educational and interactive components into the new *Discovering the Civil War* exhibit. The exhibits team is aware of the challenges in terms of technology, design, cohesion, and most importantly expectations. All those involved with the development of this project are especially mindful of the nation’s watchful eye in how they choose to represent one of the most important events in this nation’s history. They understand the magnitude of this exhibit. They also understand that as the National Archives there is a public expectation that this institution is held to a higher standard. This may suggest a response to the Smithsonian’s experience who in their “attempt to present a critical account of the Enola Gay and the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki” resulted in harsh criticism, a delay in the opening of the exhibit due to its re-structuring, and the eventual resignation of the museum’s director. Over time the successes and failures of this exhibit will be critical to NARA’s image development within the scope of the public and academic community.

After its premiere in 2010 at the National Archives, this major traveling exhibit will tour the country at host museums for three and a half years. It will travel extensively throughout the United States with the intent to reach as many audiences as possible. With such large exposure expected, one must consider the juxtaposition of this major exhibit with local exhibits, much like the exhibit at The Museum of Florida History, and those currently in development that are often produced on a much lower scale. How

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then do the National Archives and The Museum of Florida History deal with the contested memories of the Civil War? Do similarities exist between each institute’s approach?

Commemorations, monuments, and memorials to the Civil War vary from state to state, north and south, community to community, and across racial and cultural demographics. The Civil War took place in over ten thousand locations across the United States thereby producing ten thousand different views of those events. Even so, significant battles and occurrences, though documented in official records and photographs, will always vary if even slightly from person to person. Interpretations of these records can thus provide opportunities for the occurrence of direct and indirect biasness, and in some situations allow for the creation of a historical account that is not entirely accurate. In NARA’s efforts to lessen the function and role of memory regarding the Civil War, they have chosen to highlight its collections and its access for researchers. As a result the National Archives hopes to allow visitors to create a much more accurate understanding of this conflict. However, this is not to say that the topic of memory is left untouched, in fact it is one of the larger themes included in the exhibit’s thirteen galleries.

The exhibit begins with a prologue section that introduces the content and presentation of the material, allowing visitors to prepare for a hands-on interactive approach that encourages the questioning of objects by researchers in hopes of spurring a return visit to answer those questions. Visitors are then guided through the following galleries, including, “Break Apart,” “Raising Armies,” “Finding Leaders,” “We Were All There,” “A Local Fight,” “A Global War,” “Spies and Conspiracies,” “Emancipation,” “Occupation,” “Prisoners and Casualties,” “Technology,” and ending with “Memory.” Although the thirteen sections vary in size, together, they identify what the National Archives considers the most important themes of the war.

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84 National Archives and Records Administration, “Civil War Discoveries,” (Minutes to meeting regarding Discovering the Civil War in author’s possession, National Archives I, Washington D.C., August 30, 2006).
Figure 1. “Discovering the Civil War’s flexible, thematic organizational plan allows for reconfiguration in exhibit galleries with different shapes.” Discovering the Civil War Viewbook, July 2008. © National Archives Experience

The gallery entitled “Breaking Apart” will hope to answer the question of what is needed to form a government and to attempt to create a new nation. It will also include the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, different legislative compromises in 1860 and 1861 and a letter describing the failure of compromising efforts, in an attempt to provide evidence that Americans tried to prevent the Civil War. “Raising Armies” will focus on the topic of how to assemble an army and navy, the tools necessary to train, organize, and supply an army, and explore the available choices for a civilian not interested in military service. Documents for the “Finding Leaders” gallery will include lists of instructors and class rosters at West Point, including a “possible interactive demonstrating how the different military and political leaders knew each other before the war.” “We Were All There” will describe the extraordinary challenges faced by civilians, soldiers, and sailors. It will answer the question of “who served?” The gallery entitled, “A Local Fight” will feature original documents describing “the war [sic] as much a matter of small scale raids and guerilla war as it was large battles involving thousands of troops.” Possible
records include maps of battles, known and not so well known, a telegram describing the Confederate raid on Lawrence, Kansas, and General Order #11 that led to the evacuation of 20,000 residents and the destruction of property in four Missouri counties.” A letter thanking the Emperor of China for banning “Confederate ships from Chinese ports” and statements of the British public reaction to the Emancipation Proclamation will be included in the gallery, “A Global War.” The “Spies and Conspiracies” gallery will included documents relating to the John Wilkes Booth conspiracy, and “numerous depositions and letters charging disloyalty.” They are intended to inform the audience of the conspiracies and secret organizations organized during the Civil War Years. The “Emancipation” gallery will focus on three distinct topics which include: the idea that Emancipation was gradual and uneven, that African Americans actively pursued their freedom, and that the Proclamation fundamentally transformed the nature of the war. NARA’s goal with the gallery entitled, “Occupation” will be to describe the occupation of the South beginning in 1861 and to demonstrate the conflict between the Union Army and southern civilians. It will also discuss the Thirteenth Amendment, and demonstrate that while slavery ended with this legislation, “the place of African Americans in southern society continued to be a contentious issue after 1865.” “Prisoners and Casualties” will answer the question of what a soldier could expect to experience if he were wounded or became sick during battle. It will also investigate how people died in battle, and highlight the expected conditions and treatment of a soldier taken prisoner during the war. Lastly, “Technology” will include patent drawings of inventions, ships plans, drawings of a rotating gun for a ship, and a letter written by Lincoln regarding invention. This gallery will also include a possible interactive that allows the visitor to explore the Civil War through photographs.  

At a staff meeting in August 2006, Marvin Pinkert, Director of the National Archives Experience, shared his view of the exhibit team’s approach when he stated that he “[did not] want the [exhibit] to get too didactic. We want to draw the visitors in and let them feel like they are drawing their own conclusions” based on the records

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85 National Archives and Records Administration, “Possible Civil War Documents & Discoveries,” (Minutes to meeting regarding Discovering the Civil War in author’s possession, National Archives I, Washington D.C., October 2007).
Curators decided upon the idea of getting people involved in the subject matter by placing them in the shoes of people that are doing the discovering, such as teachers, historians, historic preservation specialists, archeologists, re-enactors, filmmakers, and a variety of other researchers. The use of moving, kinetic images would therefore “unlock traditional ways of looking at Civil War history and create a new view of the war.” Visitors will be able to explore a single document that can lead to other documents in the National Archives thereby creating mini-stories about a person or event. Another opportunity exists with the use of multiple documents that share the same form or characteristic. For instance, the Archives hold a large number of patent drawings, photographs, Lincoln telegrams and maps but they are not usually tied to one subject. Through this exploration, the Archives hopes to illicit responses that will excite the visitor to perform further research, highlight the amount and types of records available and thus allow them to form connections with documents never before displayed.

Unlike most museum exhibits Discovering the Civil War will give visitors the chance to “walk in the shoes of researchers, unlock secrets, solve mysteries, and uncover unexpected events in our records.” No longer is the visitor placed in a static environment with little to no interaction between the object and themselves. The idea of performing research forces the visitor to question what they may already know about the Civil War. This framework works particularly well for the gallery located at the end of the exhibit, entitled “Memorials, Merchandise, and Memory.”

“Memorials, Merchandise, and Memory” will feature a “computer interactive, set among reproductions of records from NARA that touch on the way people remember the Civil War.” Records for the exhibit were chosen for their “capacity to surprise and

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86 National Archives and Records Administration, “Civil War Discoveries,” (Minutes to meeting regarding Discovering the Civil War in author’s possession, National Archives I, Washington D.C., August 30, 2006).
87 National Archives and Records Administration, “Notes on Prologue and Welcome Areas,” (Minutes to meeting regarding Discovering the Civil War in author’s possession, National Archives I, Washington D.C., July 21, 2008).
90 The Foundation for the National Archives, “Memorials, Merchandise, and Memory,” (Minutes to meeting regarding Discovering the Civil War in author’s possession, National Archives I, Washington D.C., July 10, 2008).
excite visitors.”91 Many of them have never before been viewed by the larger public, thus it provides for a fresh new perspective when combined with twenty-first century technology. The central focus of this gallery is “designed around the idea that the memory of the war has its own history and that individuals consciously choose to remember the war and its meaning in different ways.”92

One of the major features of this exhibit will be a computer terminal with the heading, “How do You Remember the Civil War?” The visitor will thus be able to touch the interactive screen similar in style to a webpage or blog that discusses the ways in which Americans have remembered the Civil War over time. The virtual archives of memories will contain a series of categories that will allow the visitor to explore documents presented before them. Some of the topics may include memorials, merchandise, parks and cemeteries, heroes, anniversaries, and tourism to name a few possibilities. Once a category is selected, the visitor will have a series of “documents and images that create a virtual archives of memory.”93

When the hall is complete, the site goes “live” (only in the gallery) and comments start streaming in from the imaginary “blogosphere.” One post might ask why Jefferson Davis was included in the “Heroes” section but not Lincoln or Frederick Douglass; another might wonder if a posting of a document on Vicksburg is an emphasis on memorializing a battlefield ignores the causes of the war; while a choice of a commemorative place brings a comment that this document is too commercial for such a serious subject.94

91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
Clearly, these questions reflect NARA’s desire to see that its visitors have the opportunity to discover the Civil War for themselves by seeing and thinking about records that have personal resonance. 95

The major sub-themes for the Memory gallery pose two different and distinct questions: How have Americans chosen to remember the Civil War? –and –What were the legacies of the Civil War? To answer these questions the curatorial staff selected a variety of documents, each of which are engaging and readily appeal to historians and non-historians alike. Included in the section of how Americans have chosen to remember the Civil War are: an advertisement for a biography of Stonewall Jackson seized by the Union Provost Marshal in Kentucky from 1864, the cover of a brochure promoting travel to Vicksburg National Military Park entitled, “Vicksburg for the Tourist – (1929-1930), the juxtaposition of a World War II poster with an image of WWII gravestones with an image of Abraham Lincoln that includes words from the Gettysburg Address, Drawings of “Frederick Douglass Statesman, Abolitionist, Champion of the People,” “Mississippi’s Greatest Hour”…A Manual for Local Observances of the Centennial of the War Between the States (1961-1965), and a photograph of Union and Confederate veterans shaking hands across the stone wall at the 1938 “Blue and Gray Reunion” at Gettysburg. 96

As a collection, these documents offer contrasting visions of memory and can be expected to illicit similar responses. The focus of the gallery appears to promote peace, goodwill, recreation, and an overall encompassing pro-Northern viewpoint. The drawings of Douglass, excerpts from the “Great Emancipator’s” most famous speech, and the shaking of hands by opposing forces do not necessarily reflect how all Americans remember the Civil War. Still, the records and documents included in this exhibit represent the theme of memory through the eyes of a federal government agency as opposed to those memories held by the general population.

The second section of “Memorials, Merchandise, and Memory” entitled, “What were the legacies of the Civil War?” will include documents such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (“An Act to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the

95 The Foundation for the National Archives, Request for Proposal, 6.
United States), an Anti-lynching petition signed by Frederick Douglass, Francis Grimke, and Mary Church Terrell from 1893, a newspaper clipping describing efforts to redraw boundaries of Tuskegee, Alabama, to prevent African Americans from voting (1957), an image of an African American soldier reading the Emancipation Proclamation to a family of slaves, a photograph of leaders of the March on Washington at Lincoln Memorial, and numerous photos depicting segregation throughout the United States. Smaller societal events, celebrations, and festivals remain unrecognized in this exhibit and thus fail to address the memories held by families and their communities. A combination of national and local memorials can add to a better understanding of the more popular influences and views of the war and their continual passing from generation to generation.

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From its inception and throughout the preliminary planning stages, Discovering the Civil War was meant to provide a balanced view, one that is neither pro Union nor pro Confederate, realizing that not all visitors coming in have a “northern perspective.”\textsuperscript{98}

The nature of the exhibit is created in a way that allows the National Archives to explore a contested memory, without appearing biased, supportive, or sympathetic in any form. They are not creating or dictating what should or should not be remembered, rather they are relying on the documents and records to offer glimpses of what Americans have

\textsuperscript{98} The Foundation for the National Archives, “Civil War” (Minutes from meeting regarding the Discovering the Civil War in author’s possession, National Archives I, Washington D.C., September 11, 2006).
chosen to remember about the conflict. It is an approach that the curators hope will be both “authoritative” in tone and yet, unbiased in its representation.

The complexity of the Civil War goes beyond the social, political, military, economic, and ideological impact of the individuals who experienced it and who later described first-hand accounts to future generations. Because memories are entirely abstract, a general, all encompassing recollection of this event does not exist. The one hundred and seventy African American soldiers from Kentucky who petitioned the Senate and House of Representatives for the right to vote in July 1867 would most likely not share the same memory of the war as that of the United Daughters of the Confederacy who campaigned tirelessly for the erection of monuments dedicated to the memory of the Confederate dead. 99 The passage of time may have healed some wounds and helped lead to a greater understanding and acceptance of others; however, this does not necessarily make the issue of commemoration and remembrance any easier. For an institute such as the National Archives, it can be a much more tedious and complex task to accomplish for it and the nation are fully aware of the standard it set with the completion of this exhibit. This matter was further discussed in a July 16, 2008, meeting by the National Archives Experience Team. Curators, exhibit designers, directors and members of the design firm met to discuss some of the expectations and challenges in producing this exhibit. This included areas such as technology, design, cohesion, and visitor expectations. All participants agreed that the successes and failures of Discovering the Civil War would be critical to the image development of the National Archives over time.100

Most, if not all, aspects of Discovering the Civil War, will be scrutinized, from the layout of the galleries, the tone of the text, to the selection and presentation of artifacts and documents chosen for exhibition. Visitors will also pay close attention as well to the objects excluded and the quantity of space dedicated to each theme. Americans and curators alike and throughout the nation will be exploring and studying all of these intricate parts, however it is NARA’s hope that public audiences will recognize the

100 The Foundation for the National Archives, “National Archives Experience Bi-weekly Meeting” (Minutes from Team Meeting in author’s possession, National Archives I, Washington D.C., July 16, 2008).
documents and records for what they are, gathering their own meaning from them, as opposed to any meaning applied to the records by the exhibition staff.

One of the major struggles with public history is attempting to balance a presentation of historical interpretation while still allowing the public to reach their own conclusions. Public historians are “keepers” to the nation’s past, and therefore entrusted with presenting factual information to the general public. As a government entity, the National Archive’s role is not necessarily to instill a deeper understanding of history’s cultural function, but more to remind its visitors of the records available to them from which they are able to draw their own personal conclusions. The concept of Discovering the Civil War will be undoubtedly new to many visitors, who are accustomed to the methods previously used by museums whereby the audience member is more of a passive learner as opposed to an active learner who is encouraged to ask, question, and generate his/her own ideas and answers through records and documents. “Memorials, Merchandise, and Memory” is an attempt at this new approach. Visitors can expect to encounter the ways in which governments, communities, societies, and everyday Americans memorialize and commemorate the Civil War, and not a mark-up of what should be remembered and how.
CHAPTER THREE: EXHIBITING THE CIVIL WAR IN FLORIDA’S CAPITAL

The idea of learning history through objects, documents, records, is by no means a new concept. The concept of interactives was first implemented in the early 1970s and primarily used across the board by Children’s and Science museums throughout the country. History museums have been slower to adapt this new approach of visitor learning to their exhibit galleries. In the case of The National Archives, Discovering the Civil War, will provide a perfect example of a history museum embracing this approach on a much larger, national scale. In the early 1990s, Tallahassee museums such as the Museum of Florida History (MFH) and the Florida Legislative Research Center & Museum at the Historic Capitol began to revamp their exhibits as opportunities permitted and as a result of national influences in the museum field.

Rather than wait for a milestone anniversary, the Museum of Florida History (MFH) began their preliminary research into what would later turn out to be the opening of an exhibit in 1994 entitled, Florida in the Civil War. Since its opening in 1977, the museum’s growing collections have continually forced the institute to develop new permanent galleries throughout the years. Interested in learning more about their own collections, curators set out to identify and gather information about the thousands of objects collected from throughout the state that were in some way related to the history of Florida. Soon after, and throughout the following year, the decision was made by the curatorial staff to propose a temporary exhibit about Florida’s role in the American Civil War.101

Serious planning began with visits to area museums both in and out of Florida. Curators visited private museums in the Pensacola area, as well as the D-Day Museum located in New Orleans, and the private non-for-profit Museum of the Confederacy (MOC) located in Richmond. The intent was to garner a feel for the types of exhibits already in place and to evaluate their methods, tone, structure, presentation, and overall effectiveness in accomplishing their major goals while still actively engaging their audience. The research excursions also provided an idea of the various artifacts that could potentially be used for the exhibit at the MFH. This enabled the staff to fill in gaps

101 Robert Bruce Graetz (Senior Museum Curator, Museum of Florida History), in discussion with the author, November 17, 2008.
of certain objects not found in their own collections but whose ties can be traced back to Florida.

In particular, the Museum of the Confederacy has a large and extensive collection of Florida related artifacts, some of which are still on loan to the MFH for the *Florida in the Civil War* exhibit. Curators from MFH also took note of the Museum of the Confederacy’s layout and exhibition space. Known for having “the world’s largest collection of Confederate Civil War artifacts,” the MOC made use of this collection by dedicating an entire exhibit room to each of the eleven states of the Confederate States of America. Thus, the information gathered from these excursions in part, helped in the creation of what is now the permanent exhibit at the Museum of Florida History.

According to curator Robert Bruce Graetz, the purpose of *Florida in the Civil War*, is to address and explain the major issues and topics unique to Florida and the state’s role to the major cause. Thus, curators are hesitant to label the exhibit as a direct form of official history. Working between the time frame of 1861 and 1865, the curatorial staff was restricted from including much information on the causes and events leading up to the Civil War, and its effect and legacy in Florida since. The exhibit is not intended to produce or describe any type of a collective social memory. This approach is similar to that of NARA’s overall goals and perspective with *Discovering the Civil War*. Unlike NARA, however, the staff at MFH did not wish to interpret how the war is viewed today.

Living in a Southern city, they purposely wanted to avoid any of the modern controversies and memories associated with this event. Curators believed that if they kept within this very specific historical timeline that they could eliminate the potential problem of imposing their own ideas. At the same time, the curators knew they would have to create an exhibit that would recognize Florida’s unique experience. For instance, they needed to note that Florida’s role was not as large as other Confederate states. Curators chose to emphasize battles and daily life on the homefront in the exhibit’s twelve galleries. Display cases include weapons, battle flags, uniforms, letters, tools, equipment, and many other war related items.

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103 Graetz, in discussion with the author, November 17, 2008.
The individual galleries include the following: “Florida Secedes from the Union,” “Florida on the Eve of the Civil War,” “Unionism in Florida,” “Battle Flags,” “Abandoning Coastal Defenses,” “Florida in the Confederate Economy,” “Crisis at Pensacola: 1861,” “African-American Floridians,” “Battle of Olustee,” “The Union Navy in Florida Waters,” “The Battle of Natural Bridge,” and lastly, “The War Ends: Surrender, Occupation, and Emancipation.” A glance of these galleries corroborates the curator’s desire to focus on the events experienced by Floridians during the Civil War, with little room for interpretation of its lasting effects and memory.

104 Museum of Florida History, Florida in the Civil War, R.A. Gray Building, 500 South Bronough Street Tallahassee, FL 32399, November 17, 2008.
Of particular interest is a single section dedicated solely to the everyday life of African Americans located halfway through the exhibit that discusses their experiences before, during, and after the Civil War through the use of text and artifacts. However, this also proved to be one of the major challenges faced by the curatorial staff. According to Graetz, they would have liked to have made a larger African American section but they were limited by a lack of available materials. Images reflecting life on the plantation during this period, were extremely difficult to acquire, therefore curators chose to supplement this section with post-war photographs. Hence, while the curators said that they chose to start the exhibit in 1861 to avoid discussions of the causes of the Civil War, in this way they tried to be faithful to history by bringing in discussions of slavery into the story.

Figure 4. African American Floridians exhibit is shown in the background behind the cannon. Florida in the Civil War, Museum of Florida History. Date/Place Captured: Photographed in Tallahassee, FL, December 11, 2008. © Esther H. Berumen

Graetz, in discussion with the author, November 17, 2008.
While this exhibit provides a general and concise overview of Florida during the Civil War a variety of questions remain unanswered. Does it is matter that this exhibit is sponsored by the state’s primary institution for presenting history and is located in the state’s capital? Is MFH held to a particular standard when compared to other local Civil War exhibits? Do visitors regard this institution as the central repository for all things related to the Civil War in the state of Florida? Did the creation of Florida in the Civil War fill a void not currently addressed by other exhibits throughout the capital city? To begin with, the Museum of Florida History’s mission states that the objects acquired for its collections, “must have been made, purchased, or used in Florida, [and] they must be useful for exhibition or study…” This statement clearly identifies the Museum of Florida History as the official repository for all the artifacts directly related to the state. Therefore, the exhibits presented by this institute are indeed held to a much higher standard than other local museums. Visitors’ expectations may also increase due to its location in the R.A. Gray Building, home to both the State Archives and the State Library. All three state funded agencies serve as centers for research, and “guardians” to the state’s past. For this reason, some visitors may expect to see an all encompassing presentation of the Civil War, to include more information about the role of slavery, Florida’s shift from a cotton plantation culture to a society focused on agriculture, and the memories left behind by the people who lived through the conflict.

At the time of its opening, Florida in the Civil War, did not face competition from any other permanent Civil War exhibit. It was therefore able to freely develop its own agenda with regard to its stature as the state’s official museum. Curators remained cautious of this fact and, although their investigations led them to examine other exhibits located throughout the south, they failed to study a single exhibit located north of the Mason Dixon line. This in turn, could have provided the curators with an unconventional point of view, possibly even allowing for the inclusion of memory in their own exhibit.

The objects on display and the topics discussed, while chosen for their obvious appeal to visitors, indeed avoid any form of controversial discussion. There is no mention of commemorations, celebrations, or memorials dedicated to the soldiers or the

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Confederate government in general. Visitors are not asked to reflect upon their own memories as they view the different galleries. To a much smaller degree an opportunity for commenting upon all of the Museum of Florida History’s exhibits as a whole, is offered upon exit.

Curators have been careful to avoid the topic of memory by ignoring it completely. In sticking with the given timeline, little if any room for even the slightest insinuation of a collective memory exists. For this reason, audience members are forced to search elsewhere for information regarding commemorations, celebrations, and memorials dedicated to the remembrance of the war, its people, and its legacy in Tallahassee.

Florida’s Historic Capitol Museum – Florida Legislative Research Center & Museum

Three blocks west of the Museum of Florida History lies Tallahassee’s newest Civil War exhibit, The Capitol During Wartime hosted by the Office of Legislative Services and under the direction of the Florida Legislative Research Center & Museum (FLRC&M). Well before its opening in November 2008, planning for this exhibit began during the summer of 2006.\footnote{Andrew Edel (Exhibits Projects Manager, Office of Legislative Services/Historic Capital), in discussion with the author, November 22, 2008.} It was in this year that Florida’s Legislature decided to take over the management of the Old Historic Capitol from the Department of State and refurbish its museum and create a research facility. The mission of the FLRC&M is “to promote an understanding and appreciation of Florida’s political history and to facilitate its preservation for posterity.”\footnote{Florida Legislature Research Center & Museum, “Mission Statement,” Florida Legislature Research Center & Museum at the Historic Capital, \url{http://www.flrcm.gov} (accessed December 2, 2008).} The change was welcomed by many members of the curatorial staff, who at the time were hoping to change and update present exhibits.

And while the museum staff hosts a large number of local elementary school groups, the Old Capitol Museum’s previous exhibits failed to appeal to everyday visitors. During the search for fresh ideas, Exhibit Projects Manager, Andrew Edel, proved to be an instrumental figure in identifying, researching, and planning the layout for the The...
The Capitol During Wartime exhibit. The exhibit is a clear reflection of the museum’s intent to capture events that occurred within the walls of the capitol building.

According to Edel, the major focus of the exhibit is to identify Tallahassee’s role and its activities during times of war. It is not intended to be specific to the Civil War time frame. However, the Capitol During Wartime exhibit is undoubtedly dominated by the Civil War. This strong bias exists due to the grand prominence of the cannon, which demands the greatest attention, the display of the many state flags created during war time, and a side panel dedicated solely to the capital’s activities in 1865.

Upon his selection as lead project manager, Edel immediately began to search for items and objects to include in the gallery. One of the first and, as it turned-out, pivotal pieces to be collected for the exhibit was the cannon fired by Princess Murat on January 10, 1861, to celebrate the legislature’s vote for secession.109 Visitors to the exhibit are immediately confronted with this piece due in great part to its size and central location. The combination of flags, memorabilia, artifacts, and the cannon, set the tone for the exhibit, and prepare the visitor for a look at war activities occurring in Florida and the capital during the nineteenth century.

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109 Hare, Tallahassee: A Capital History, 54.
A major focal point of the *Capitol During Wartime* exhibit are the nine flags that adorn the walls of the small exhibit room, eight of which are known to have at one point been officially raised and flown atop Florida’s capitol building, and are therefore not all specifically connected to the Civil War.\(^{110}\) Information regarding the replication of these flags was gathered from a variety of sources, such as books, diaries, photographs, detailed descriptions and in some cases by studying the originals.\(^ {111}\) Panels along the walls identify the flags, beginning with Florida’s entry into the Union “as the twenty-seventh state on March 3, 1845.”\(^ {112}\) This flag was similar in style and layout to the nation’s current one. This flag is immediately followed by the first flag designed and created for the inauguration of Florida’s first Governor, William D. Moseley.\(^ {113}\) Although this flag remained unrecognized as Florida’s official state flag, it is very unique in its

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\(^{110}\) Edel (Exhibits Projects Manager, in discussion with the author, November 22, 2008.

\(^{111}\) Ibid.


\(^{113}\) Ibid.
motto, which states, “Let Us Alone” in large capital letters indirectly centered towards the right portion of the flag. It appears almost as an ironic metaphor to suggest the use of this phrase upon gaining entry to the Union, but extremely fitting sixteen years later as the state voted to secede.

A new and different flag emerged at this time bearing an awkward resemblance to the official flag of the United States. The use of red, white, and blue, coupled with stars and stripes invokes a feeling of patriotism and honor, while the heading, “The Rights of the South at All Hazards!” pledges unmistakable loyalty to its southern beliefs and heritage. It is the flag believed to have had its official unveiling on January 10, 1861 during the ceremonial announcement of the *Ordinance of Secession* by acting Governor John Milton and subsequently displayed during the course of the war in Florida’s House of Representatives.\(^\text{114}\) Florida’s fourth flag is the “First National Flag of the Confederacy” and the one of many that is believed to have been “flown over the capitol from 1861-1863.”\(^\text{115}\) The exhibit’s fifth flag was created under the orders of Governor Madison S. Perry, and featured a similar color scheme as the previous two; however, it is not known whether or not this flag was ever actually raised over the Capitol.\(^\text{116}\) Florida did not see the unveiling of another flag until seven years later in 1868 mandated by the state’s new Constitution which set strict guidelines as to the adopting of a state seal and emblem and its implementation on the state flag.\(^\text{117}\) Lastly, Florida residents witnessed the creation of the final state flag design in 1900 with the addition of two diagonal red crosses in an attempt to appease Governor Francis P. Fleming who suggested the current flag closely resembled that of a “white flag of truce.”\(^\text{118}\) Together, these flags produce a timeline of the state, highlighting significant moments and events in which the state’s leadership and role was at times contested by opposing factions.

The memory of the Civil War is embedded in other parts of the museum’s exhibits through a variety of panels, each of which touch upon separate themes and occurrences involving the state capitol building. For instance, cultural history is also

\(^\text{114}\) Ibid.  
\(^\text{115}\) Ibid.  
\(^\text{116}\) Ibid.  
\(^\text{117}\) Ibid.  
\(^\text{118}\) Ibid.
presented alongside political history in a panel entitled, “It Happened Here: Events from 1922 to 1936.” Topics include the use of the newly constructed addition to the House Chamber shortly after 1923, citizens celebrating the city’s centennial celebration, alterations made to the capitol due to its expanding growth over this period, the opening of the first museum within the capital operated by the Florida Geological Survey and its collections, and the ceremonial return of a Florida Confederate unit’s battle colors by Union veterans in 1927, marking it as the only known return of its kind to have ever occurred between the two groups in Florida.\textsuperscript{119} It is a type of occurrence similarly expressed by historians, namely Paul A. Shackel, in describing how the war was remembered shortly after the 1920’s. This final example is unique only to the Museum of Florida’s exhibit and thus reinforces the Museum’s focus in highlighting the Capitol’s history.

Situated neatly towards the center of the room and in some respects, competing for floor space next to the cannon, is the exhibit case entitled,\textit{ The Capitol During Wartime}. The intention of this case is to describe and educate the public on the happenings and affairs of the state government during state, national, and international warfare. Once again, emphasis rests upon the contributions of the state during these conflicts while also recognizing prominent and key individuals whose actions and memory must not go unnoticed. According to the exhibit, four major wars were fought in Florida during the nineteenth century beginning in 1846 through 1898. They are the “Mexican American War (1846-1848),” “Third Seminole War (1855-1858),” “Civil War (1861-1865),” and the “Spanish-American War (1898).”\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
The short synopsis of the Civil War text, once again discusses the capitol's role as the staging ground for Florida's Confederate Government and the signing of the Ordinance of Secession on January 10, 1865. According to historians, it was also the site for "storing arms, supplies, and housing Confederate troops in the basement." Accompanying the text is a portrait of "former slave and Union veteran, Josiah T. Walls," who later served as the first African American Congressman from Florida, along with artwork depicting a scene from the Battle of Olustee. Other supplemental artifacts include Confederate currency issued by the Confederate States of America, an officer's 121 Ibid. 122 Ibid.
sword, hat, diary and a separate portrait of Susan Bradford Eppes, a Tallahassee resident and relative of Thomas Jefferson who published a book about her daily life during the war, and a photograph depicting the members from the 1861 Constitutional Convention. The free-standing panel entitled, “Great Events of 1865,” is divided into four sections, “The Union Army Arrives in Tallahassee,” The Final Days of Confederate Florida,” “The Slaves Are Freed: The Emancipation Proclamation,” and “Transfer Ceremony at the Capitol.”

“The Union Army Arrives” is a direct reference to the planned entry and subsequent transfer of government power to Union Brigadier General Edward McCook and his army from Confederate Major General Samuel Jones. This occurred after General Robert E. Lee’s official surrender in Virginia and General Joseph E. Johnston’s surrender in North Carolina. General McCook acted quickly in the short ten days he spent in Tallahassee to properly secure the Confederate capital beginning with the “[confiscation] of Confederate arms and supplies, and [issuing] paroles to thousands of Confederate soldiers.” Images of General McCook and an unidentified Confederate soldier add visual appeal to the exhibit and help to bolster the text.

Prior to General McCook’s arrival in Tallahassee, residents were urged by Governor A.K. Allison “to cooperate with Union officials as much as possible.” Ideally McCook could not have asked for better conditions in which to conduct his official duty. He later noted that “the population [was] very generous under the conditions.” These events along with the ceremonious raising of the Union flag are recorded under “The Final Days of Confederate Florida” and include a photograph of Governor Allison.

For many, the most memorable event marking General McCook’s brief visit to the capital city is that of his reading of the Emancipation Proclamation to an anxious crowd composed of slaves, slave-owners, and local residents from Tallahassee and Leon county. They gathered in anticipation to learn the fate of the black population and witness the announcement that had for years existed only in rumor. These rumors were

123 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
finally laid to rest on May 20, 1865. The exhibit’s panel, “The Slaves Are Freed: The Emancipation Proclamation,” describes this event, and the celebrations that followed. Blacks cheered as the Union flag was once again raised above the Capitol, a moment experienced by many under a “general air of extreme satisfaction.”¹²⁹ A picnic was held later that same day at Bull’s Pond, known today as Lake Ella, attended by two-thousand newly freed slaves.¹³⁰ A photograph of former slave hand, Tony Davis, serves as an example of one individual out of many who benefited directly from the announcement of this document in Florida.

The fourth and final topic included in the panel, “Great Events of 1865” is that of the “Transfer Ceremony at the Capitol.” Shortly after the raising of the Union flag, Confederate forces, supplies, and the state’s government were turned over to General McCook and his staff. The ceremony was further marked by the firing of cannons and guns later that same evening on May 20, 1865.¹³¹ An undated photograph of the capitol, presumably from the same period concludes this panel and the many events marking the end of the Civil War in Florida.

Research for this exhibit was primarily performed by Edel with the assistance of local historians, archivists, and a number of other professionals and experts familiar with Tallahassee and its capitol building. As project manager, Edel’s position required him to supplement his research and findings with objects and artifacts relevant to the exhibit’s textual information. The exhibit’s planning, research, and creation remained under construction and constant revision for more than a year. As a result of these efforts, Edel was able to acquire objects on loan from the Museum of Florida History, from online purchases through EBay, and from donations by local community members.

According to Edel, since its opening, The Capitol During Wartime exhibit has received a positive response from visitors and local residents. The desire by the FLRC&M to develop an engaging exhibit while focusing on the proceedings of Florida’s state government within the capitol building in times of war, is a unique and fitting approach for a building steeped in history. When asked about the comparison between the The Capitol During Wartime exhibit and the Museum of Florida History’s exhibit,

¹²⁹ Ibid.
¹³⁰ Ibid.
¹³¹ Ibid.
Florida During the Civil War, Edel described a collaborative relationship where both teams work together, void of any competition and further stating that each institution believes in the philosophy that “the more information out there [about the Civil War] the better.” Additionally, Edel states that the focus and approaches between the two museums are vastly different.

From the onset, the goal of the exhibition was to describe and interpret the role of the state government during times of state and federal conflict in the nineteenth century. The project’s objective was intended to answer the question of what state officials were doing during this time, the type of legislation they were attempting to pass, the effect of the conflict on the state’s everyday proceedings, and a description of the short and long term effects and outcomes on the government itself as a result of these events. However, upon closer scrutiny, it is evident that a great majority of the exhibit is dedicated to the Civil War. It is possible to attribute this to a number of different factors. Federal records for some of the earlier wars may be scarce and thus unavailable whereas the availability of information and objects relating to the Civil War are much more common and attainable. Diaries, letters, and journals from local residents may not offer descriptive details about the other wars, or perhaps general interest in the Civil War is much more profound than any of the other conflicts combined. In any case, the remembrance of this national conflict as presented by the FLRC&M provides a greater understanding of the events occurring at the capital, before, during, and after the war.

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132 Edel, in discussion with the author, November 22, 2008.
CHAPTER FOUR: COMMEMORATING EMANCIPATION

The National Archives Foundation, The Museum of Florida History, and Florida’s Historic Capitol Museum, together provide separate, but official interpretations of Civil War history and memory for public audiences. As federal and state funded institutions, these museums garner a high level of attention, thus overshadowing other celebrations related to the Civil War, particularly in Tallahassee. Yet there remain two other annual Emancipation Day celebrations, one hosted by The Knott House Museum, and the other by the Walker Ford Community Center, that are well attended by members of the community. Tallahassee’s history of celebrating this particular event dates back to the nineteenth century. A closer study of these celebrations uncovers contrasting approaches to the same event by separate groups and organizations.

For millions of former bond servants, the institution of “slavery destroyed families and warped relationships.” \(^{133}\) Shortly after gaining freedom, those who could legally formalize their marriages did so according to James West Davidson. “Sometimes they married in couples and sometimes in group ceremonies that included well over one hundred people.” \(^{134}\) Thus emancipation afforded different opportunities to former slaves throughout the south. Those who were able to, used their newfound freedom as an opportunity to search out loved ones lost as a result of slavery. Others embraced every opportunity to celebrate with those dearest to them; and may suggest why, for the majority of African Americans, Emancipation Day has ultimately focused on celebrations involving family, friends, and the community at large.

**The Knott House Celebration**

Union Major General Edward McCook arrived in Tallahassee on May 10, 1865, under orders from Major General J. H. Wilson. \(^{135}\) He set up an office in what was then known as the “Hagner Mansion,” a property owned by Mrs. Hagner, a former prominent citizen of Tallahassee. The following morning, May 20\(^{th}\), while standing on the front

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\(^{134}\) Ibid.

\(^{135}\) Robert Bruce Graetz, email message to Karin Stanford, April 05, 2001.
steps of the Park Avenue home, McCook announced the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation which had occurred almost three years earlier by former President Abraham Lincoln. Celebrations ensued throughout the African American community soon after the reading of the entire document. And although the yearly celebration of this event on May 20th has seen its struggles, it is still commemorated today, one-hundred and forty-eight years later. In some respects this event is similar in style and memory as the annual “Juneteenth” commemorations celebrated in Texas and elsewhere usually on or about June 19th. A combination of the words “June” and “nineteen,” referring to the day in which, “General Gordon Granger landed at Galveston, Texas, with a regiment of Union Army soldiers” on June 19, 1865, to announce that the people of Texas held in bondage where to be set free in accordance with the Emancipation Proclamation. Although communities choose to celebrate on different dates, these events are united in honoring of ancestors who first learned of their freedom by the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation, months, sometimes years after its official passing.

Located at 301 East Park Avenue at the corner of Park and Calhoun Streets, the Knott House is listed on the Park Avenue National Historic Landmark District. It is believed to have been built in 1843 by a free black man named John Proctor, a local carpenter who is responsible for the creation of other structures throughout Tallahassee. It was at this location that McCook chose to erect his headquarters for the next 11 days. At the time of the Civil War, the Hagner Mansion was owned by Catherine Hagner, widow of the late Thomas Holme Hagner, a young attorney fresh out of law school from Baltimore, Maryland, who had arrived in Tallahassee twenty-seven years earlier. Thomas Hagner purchased the original lot in 1842 from William H. Brodie for one thousand dollars. Catherine’s older brother, Robert Gamble Jr., a

141 Ibid, 6.
major in the Confederate army, took over as executor of her estate when she chose to move her family to Cheraw, South Carolina, between 1863 and 1868. While deed records prove Mrs. Hagner remained active in the buying and selling of properties throughout Tallahassee, it is unclear who welcomed McCook upon his arrival to the mansion, or why he chose the Hagner property as his post.

The mansion was later purchased by William and Luella Knott in 1928. Records indicate Mr. Knott served as State Auditor, State Treasurer, and State Comptroller. The home remained within the Knott family, until the death of their child, Charlie in 1985. The home was then “donated to the Historic Tallahassee Preservation Board to be restored and used as a historic house museum.”

The first official Emancipation Day Celebration hosted by the Knott House Museum occurred on May 19 and May 20, 1995. Currently, it is presented by the Florida Department of State through the Museum of Florida History, Knott House Museum, and in collaboration with the John G. Riley Center/Museum for African American History, and the Walker-Ford Center with sponsorship from Hopping, Green and Sams, P.A. According to a Public Service Announcement released by the Knott House Museum dated May 18, 1995, the purpose of the event was “to celebrate the anniversary of the abolishment of slavery in Florida.” The day’s events included “a commemorative ceremony and re-enactment of the historic reading of the emancipation proclamation as it was announced on the Knott House’s front steps in 1865.” However, the Knott House is fully aware of the fact that no historical record of the speech given by McCook exists. As a result, they have relied on historians, such as Dr. Cynthia Waddell to provide their version of what may have occurred during that time. Joan Matey, former Site Manager of the Museum is also aware of the danger in presenting false information and is certain to note in previous re-enactments that the opening text created by Dr. Waddell should not be misconstrued as the original speech.

142 Ibid, 10.
143 Ibid, 10.
144 Ibid, 1.
145 Ibid, 1.
146 The Knott House Museum, Schedule of Events (Tallahassee, FL: Emancipation Day Celebration Program, May 20, 1995).
148 The Knott House Museum, Public Service Announcement (Tallahassee, FL: Historic Tallahassee Preservation Board, May 18, 1995).
The Schedule of Events for the first celebration in 1995 lists a history and re-enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation in Florida, music by the FSU Gospel Choir, speeches by the Assistant Secretary of State, Chairman of the Leon County Commission and the Mayor Pro Tem, as well as a black heritage tour, a display of documents and collections from Florida A&M University’s Black Archives, and food and drink in nearby Lewis Park. Special Guests included “Keith Thomas, NPR commentator and writer for the Tallahassee Democrat and the Reverend William Proctor, the great, great grandson of John Proctor, who built the Knott House in 1843.”

In the years following the inception of this annual celebration, the Knott House Museum has added, removed, and altered its list of activities all while maintaining its original purpose and goals. However, a close review of the hosted events and activities suggests a strong pro-Union sentiment that is not normally typical of a southern Confederate capital. Aside from the obvious focal point which includes a re-enactment of McCook’s reading of the Emancipation Proclamation, public advertisement of the celebration in 1999 included “Union soldiers and southern belles wandering the streets downtown that morning, making everyone aware of the event.” Emphasis is also placed on recognizing Tallahassee’s black community particularly with commemorations honoring black Union soldiers and other notable citizens through the spreading of flowers on their graves and tombstones at Old City Cemetery. Located in the southwest corner of the cemetery are the remains of “72 Black Union soldiers killed at the Battle of Natural Bridge in the final months of the Civil War,” some of whom also served with the famed Massachusetts 54th. Other notable blacks buried here include educator John G. Riley, FAMU founder Thomas Gibbs, a descendant of builder George Proctor, and the first ordained “colored” Baptist minister, James Page.  

149 Ibid.
150 The Knott House Museum, Schedule of Events (Tallahassee, FL: Emancipation Day Celebration Program, May 17, 1997).
151 The Knott House Museum, Black Heritage Tour Notes for Dr. Cynthia Waddell (Tallahassee, FL: Emancipation Day Ceremony, May 8, 1997).
152 Ibid.
This portion of the commemoration displays a clear and deliberate effort to almost entirely exclude the existence and memory of the Confederacy altogether, if not for the inclusion of the southern belles. It is possible to suggest a desire on the part of the Knott House to interject a very minute part of women’s history in the story of the Civil War through the use of these re-enactors, however their placement and very limited roles may imply otherwise. Why are southern belles present at a celebration honoring the emancipation of slaves? Public historians could argue that if the state encourages re-enactors to play troops and southern belles they ought to also include re-enactor’s playing slaves in the audience. If modeled after Colonial Williamsburg’s successful introduction of slave re-enactors as part of its interpretation, this might prove valuable.
The idea of incorporating slaves into the storyline of Williamsburg's history was first approached in 1979. The living history museum recognized the need to move away from the "disney-isc" portrayal of history, and therefore chose to move towards the "use [of] character portrayals to help reveal the histories of their sites." Living history offers the opportunity for visitors to actively engage with characters, allowing them to create dialogue between themselves and actors posing as slaves from the colonial period. Colonial Williamsburg found this to be the most appropriate form in which to address the African slaves who at the time of the settlement numbered fifty-two percent of the total population. (Similarly, as stated earlier, Leon County was clearly the largest slave-holding county in the state, yet there is nothing to suggest this historical fact in any part of the Knott House's presentation.) Rex Ellis, at the time an instructor in the theater department at Hampton University, was one of the first actors to participate in the "first major effort to interpret African-American history at Colonial Williamsburg," spent eleven years at Williamsburg portraying a variety of roles from black cooper, barber, to minister. He describes the visitor's immediate reactions as one of delight, amusement, and curiosity. However, other visitors expressed feelings of shame and discomfort, choosing instead to ignore the actors altogether. Yet, through the years, Ellis believes the "audience's perception of 'character interpreters' changed for the better," as audiences became more comfortable with the idea of seeing an oppressive past come to life, so much so that living history interpretations are now expected at museums.

Although the focus of the event at the Knott House would remain on the Emancipation Proclamation, the presence of those emancipated is ironically an issue that makes some people uncomfortable. The Knott House has a choice. Only including white re-enactors distorts history. Hence, uncomfortable or not, there is a need to include the slaves that were known to have been in the audience listening to the presentation, and not simply Union re-enactors. Omission of a slave audience in this re-enactment depicts a more "pleasant" view of history as opposed to an "accurate"

154 Ibid, 22.
155 Ibid, 22.
156 Ibid, 22.
account of events. It is indeed ironic to omit the very people who awaited and prayed for its existence, and who stood to gain from this document’s enforcement. Public historians could argue that the Knott House might be better served without any re-enactors at all. After all, the power is in the reading of the document, not the re-enactors.

This issue of the re-enactors has been addressed by feedback received through visitor surveys from 2008’s Emancipation Day Celebration. Among the suggestions for improvement such as providing more speakers and involvement with other institutions, is the suggestion to include slave re-enactors. This observance speaks volumes to the facts, figures, and representations most important to the audience and others in attendance. In essence, it suggests the commemoration as being inadequate and lacking in its description of how the actual ceremony may have occurred. It also suggests that Americans, or citizens at least in Tallahassee, are aware of its slave-holding past and are unafraid to acknowledge this fact in a public, commemorative setting.

The recognition of emancipated slaves can also be addressed by the reading of slave accounts depicting their emotions, thoughts, and views about this most significant event. The recollection of a slave during this time, described how other slaves were known to have “dropped the plows, hoes and other farm implements and hurried to their cabins. They put on their best clothes to go see the Yankees.” Yet, another observer noted how “the soldiers and Negroes were in ecstasy; the [white] citizens were not so enthusiastic.” The description of events by these former slaves and local residents provide evidence to the assumption that there were indeed slaves present during the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation. If this is the case, then surely they must be represented in some fashion during the yearly re-enactments. If not here, then where?

Furthermore, according to an excerpt from the 2005 Emancipation Day Master of Ceremonies Script, after arriving in Tallahassee from Macon, Georgia, and “[setting] up headquarters in (present day) Knott House,” General McCook accepted control of the

158 Rivers, Slavery in Florida, 249.
159 Ibid, 249.
capital by Confederate forces serving under Major General Sam Jones. The event was further recognized by a “flag-raising ceremony at the capitol attended by state officials, Union soldiers, and newly-freed slaves.” This information suggests that former slaves were allowed to observe the official exchange of government control, and while there is no evidence to suggest their direct involvement in these activities, they are fully aware of the events occurring on the Capitol’s front steps.

Aside from the Knott House’ celebration there is one other event throughout the city willing to recognize or commemorate the hundreds of slaves who toiled on plantations and whose efforts created and strengthened the industry and economy of Tallahassee during the mid-nineteenth century. Perhaps for some, the activities associated with this event, such as the honoring of African American Union soldiers at the Old City Cemetery and the free Black Heritage Tour of African American History sites is enough to recognize these former residents. However, if the emphasis is on the reading of Emancipation Proclamation, and those most affected by its enforcement, then they too should be included in the Knott House’s programming and script to supplement that of Brigadier General Edward McCook’s.

While it may be true that the Knott House is more likely to be regarded as a House Museum and not a Living History Museum, the re-enacting of the Emancipation Proclamation’s announcement, as one of their larger community events, clearly displays their desire to bring “history to life.” Clearly, one can suggest that the public may be ready for the inclusion of slaves as audience members based on experiences at other public history sites that manage to respectfully include slavery into living history much like Colonial Williamsburg,

The Knott House Museum’s “annual observance commemorate[ing] the announcement of President Abraham Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation to the residents of Tallahassee” is one of the better known and most recognized events relating to the city’s involvement during the Civil War. However, two very prominent problems arise with this celebration. The first is that the Knott House Museum fails to

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160 The Knott House Museum, Master of Ceremonies Script (Tallahassee, FL: Emancipation Day Ceremony, May 20, 2005); Robert Bruce Graetz, email message to author, December 02, 2008.
162 The Knott House Museum, Public Service Announcement (Tallahassee, FL: Historic Tallahassee Preservation Board, May 20, 2002).
recognize or acknowledge this historical event as part of their official history inside its walls. There is no mention of this event in its permanent exhibits or acknowledged by docents in their scripts. A tour of the Knott House Museum fails to provide any type of information or mentioning of Emancipation Day throughout any part of the two-story structure. The argument by the curatorial staff in defense of this contradiction is its desire to provide a “step back in time” to a house “preserved in its 1928 décor.”

However, a room located on the second level is dedicated to events that have in some way occurred within or shaped the founding of the house. Yet, there is nothing here to suggest its ties to the Civil War. A glance of the Museum’s pamphlet provides a very brief, one-line blurb about the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation at the Knott House. Consequently, it is difficult to understand how a museum who prides itself as being the official location of the original announcement of this historic document is unable to find space in its museum to even reference this event. By ignoring and refusing to provide any information about it within the home, the Knott House Museum in a sense, is choosing to associate itself with this incredibly historic moment when it is convenient, beneficial, and perhaps even when they believe it to be appropriate to the residents of Tallahassee.

The second dilemma with this event and perhaps the more perplexing of the two is a newfound theory that may pose the greatest threat to the Knott House Museum’s annual celebration. Through extensive personal research, Senior Museum Curator, Robert Graetz, has challenged the idea of the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation on the front steps of the Knott House in 1865 as originally believed. In correspondence dated December 2, 2008, Graetz’s shared his belief based on the following:

I have not found any documentation that the Emancipation Proclamation was read from the steps of the state Capitol. I doubt that is the case. There was a ceremony there on May 20, 1865, formally raising the US flag and related ceremonies, so it could be theoretically possible. On this
same day there was a short article in the newspaper from Union General Edward McCook's staff officer announcing the Emancipation Proclamation. Paper broadsides may also have also been distributed, but this is somewhat speculative. Gen. McCook was headquartered at the Knott House (then known as the Hagner House). So, the house was clearly associated with the Emancipation Proclamation. (Sic), I am not aware that there is existing documentation to prove that General McCook actually read the Proclamation from the steps. This is not to say that he did not, just that I have not found solid evidence that he did. 164

While it is conceivable and in some respects highly probable that the original announcement of this document occurred on the steps of the Capitol to coincide with the raising of the flag, it does not take away from its connection with the Knott House. According to records provided by Site Manager of the Knott House Museum, Beatrice Cotellis, General McCook is known to have been welcomed to the house during his stay while in Tallahassee. Even so, should new information and future studies prove that the announcement did indeed take place at the Capitol as is now suspected, what changes if any will take place with the Knott House’ commemoration? It seems only appropriate to request a transfer of the re-enactment portion of the celebration to the steps of the Old Capitol Museum, while other activities such as the picnic and entertainment remain at Lewis Park and at the Knott House.

This brings into consideration another question regarding the commemoration of Civil War events in Tallahassee. A number of accounts suggest the absence of a formal event recognizing the peaceful and orderly surrender of the Confederacy to Union forces. However, one local resident, Ellen Call Long, recalled the raising of the flag on May 20th, as being followed by a gun salute, one for every state in the Union, while the lowering of the flag at sunset was commemorated with the firing of one

164 Graetz, email message to author, December 2, 2008.
hundred guns.\textsuperscript{165} It is not clear if General McCook’s announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation occurred before or after the flag raising, however its significance in marking the official end of the War in Florida is undeniable, and should therefore be recognized with its own annual ceremony.

\textit{Celebrations Throughout the Twentieth Century}

Research by the Knott House Museum has identified “Debbie Edwards, a former slave, with organizing the first Emancipation Day celebration in 1866 at Nelson Pond,” located in present day Tallahassee.\textsuperscript{166} However, it did not become an official annual event until the late 20\textsuperscript{th} Century when the City of Tallahassee and the Department of State began hosting these events. Since 1866, many celebrations were known to have occurred in local parks and ponds including “Chaires, Lake Hall, Lake Jackson, Spring Hill, Dawkins Pond, Macon, Munree, Bradfordville, Lake McBride, Buck Lake, and Testarina Baptist Church.”\textsuperscript{167} Gertrude Hill William and her family are known to have hosted what some believe to be the “longest running [commemoration] at Henry Hill Park off Centerville Road.”\textsuperscript{168} Since 1996, this highly recognized event has attracted guest speakers such as Circuit Judge Nikki Clark, and is open to all community members as stated in numerous Tallahassee newspaper articles and announcements.\textsuperscript{169} In the past, many of these events included “large picnics, festivities, pageants, and parades,” and in many cases, the cancellation of school and a day off from work, were common.\textsuperscript{170} Still others remember the twentieth of May as a time in which vendors sold homemade ice cream, lemonade, roasted peanuts, hamburgers, and hot dogs and attendees performed African-type dances.\textsuperscript{171} As a result of these

\textsuperscript{166} The Knott House Museum, \textit{Schedule of Events} (Tallahassee, FL: Emancipation Day Celebration Program, May 20, 2003).
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{169} Mary Ann Lindley, “Riley House: To Celebrate a Beautiful Time of Growth,” \textit{Tallahassee Democrat}, May 17, 1996.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid, 8.
activities, it is possible to suggest that African Americans have secured their history and memory early on in Tallahassee through the hosting of these Emancipation Day events.

Earlier accounts relating to Emancipation Day celebrations appear to address problems associated with racial tensions and issues of the time. A notice in the *Tallahassee Democrat* dated December 30, 1935, describes the planning of a holiday January 1st by local African Americans. An invitation was especially extended to local religious, civic, and educational organizations to attend. One announcement describes how “a number of speakers have been secured from the college here and from among leaders of the race in Tallahassee who will discuss welfare work, relief agencies and suggest a solution of some of the community problems.”

Deeper issues addressing racial injustice, discrimination, and equality appear at the forefront of the African American community’s agenda. It is possible that society leaders expecting a large turnout of local citizens desired to utilize the social and political environment of this event, as a comfortable and open forum to discuss grievances and issues affecting the community, and in doing so they also helped to maintain the spirit and memory of the Emancipation Proclamation.


\[173\] Ibid, 52.
Eugene Warren Clark, a “former Episcopal minister, teacher and world traveler,” is one of the lesser known figures to have hosted Emancipation Day celebrations for African Americans late in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Shortly after his graduation from Rutgers University, “Clark moved overseas between the years of 1871 to 1873, to accept a teaching position at a prominent university in Shidzuoka, Japan, including time spent “at the Tokyo Imperial University.”

Although a native of New Hampshire, Clark chose to settle in the Tallahassee area with his wife from 1883 until his death in 1907” upon his return to the United States. The couple purchased a “900-acre plantation on Lake Jackson’s western shore,” eight miles north of Tallahassee and appropriately named it Shidzuoka, “after the Japanese university he helped to start.” During the late 1890’s the plantation was transformed into an unsuccessful experimental dairy farm. Years later, Professor Clark, as he was known around town, invited then Governor William S. Jennings to his plantation along with other prominent citizens for an outdoor picnic at his sprawling plantation. Photographs dating back to

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175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
1901, offer a glimpse of the governor with Professor Clark and other guests, on the front porch steps of his estate. The inscription on the backside of the photograph reads, “Governor Jennings retired to break in May 1901 at the “Emancipation Party” Clark gave for the blacks in the area.” It is not known whether or not these remained annual events, for there are very few details about these celebrations in existence. Nor is it clear what Clark’s motivations for hosting such an event since he did not leave records.

Figure 9. Governor William S. Jennings retired to break in May 1901 at the Emancipation Party Clark gave for the blacks in the area. Photo print: b&w; 8 x 10 in. Date/Place captured: Photographed in 1901. Florida Photographic Collection, State Library and Archives of Florida.

177 Florida Department of State, Governor William S. Jennings M84-30 Papers, 1906-1919, Box 1, Florida State Archives.
Another prominent and long running Emancipation Day celebration in Tallahassee is known as “The African American Heritage Festival in Celebration of Emancipation Day.” Beginning in 1977, the Walker-Ford Community Center under the supervision of Joe N. Thomas began hosting this annual event in May. The Community Center is a part of the City of Tallahassee Parks & Recreation Department. Later, other organizations began participating in this celebration, such as the Knott House Museum and the John G. Riley Center/Museum of African American History and Culture.

The first Emancipation Day Celebration hosted by the Walker-Ford Community Center focused its theme on “Reflections of the Past-Building Toward the Future.” The two-day event included a bazaar, games and recreation, street dancing, the firing of a cannon, speakers, a showing of a film about “Martin Luther King,” performances by the Florida A&M University Drill Team, and a Choir Extravaganza. Today, the celebration has grown into a five day event with attendance at times reaching anywhere between 7,000 to 8,000 participants.

The success of this program is in large part due to the vision and dedication of Joe Thomas who began his association with the Walker-Ford Community Center in 1976. A native of Tallahassee, Thomas graduated from Florida State University in 1974 and is an active participant and member in a number of local community and religious organizations. He was highly instrumental in proposing and implementing the first Emancipation Day at the center, a year after its official opening in 1976. His desire for this celebration was a direct result of gatherings he attended throughout his life, beginning during his childhood and extending into adulthood. Thomas has vivid memories of celebrating this event as a child with his family and friends. In some respects this commemoration mirrored that of a family reunion, “It would be like a big holiday. People would take off from work and have big picnics or fish fries. Families would just come together.” Through these efforts, Thomas wants to ensure that this

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179 Ibid.
day is not forgotten and hopes that through this event, African Americans within the community understand the importance of the Emancipation Proclamation and its effect on their ancestors and the Tallahassee community. In comparison to the celebration hosted by the Knott House Museum, there is no re-enactment, although in its history celebrations encouraged attendees to “wear clothing worn by people in 1865 such as overalls, bandanas, and straw-hats.”

Figure 10. John-Walker Ford Emancipation Day Celebration Participants © Joe Thomas

Perhaps the most notable difference between the two celebrations is the size of audience each attracts. There is a stark contrast in the amount of participants drawn to the celebration hosted by the Walker-Ford Center. According to Mr. Thomas, the event

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181 Walker-Ford Center, Calendar of Events, 1977.
has been known to attract thousands of attendees in its thirty-one year history, while the same does not hold true for those attending the festivities as the Knott House Museum. Both of these institutions incorporate the same advertising tactics such as announcements in the Tallahassee Democrat, local radio stations, and cable channels. How then does one explain the attraction of one event over the other in terms of its audience? It is difficult to determine if this is due to the type of events available at each festival, the memory being recognized, or the location. Each of these two festivals are free and open to the public and they both recognize the same event, but the public memory of the two is different. For over a century, African Americans have clearly associated the announcement and its celebration with all day family parties, baseball games, parades and picnics. It is possible to suggest that the appeal of the Walker-Ford Center’s annual celebration lies in its ties to the personal memories handed down through family generations; memories that emphasized the meaning of freedom or daily life. In contrast, the smaller ceremony at the Knott House focuses on the actions of McCook. Each event plays a role in shaping public memory. The Walker-Ford’s annual commemoration maintains vernacular memory of emancipation while the Knott House event attempts to translate the vernacular into official memory.
Figure 11. John-Walker Ford Emancipation Day Celebration Participants © Joe Thomas
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The study of the Civil War and its influence in Tallahassee reveals a history that is not always in keeping with what is remembered. Unlike other key southern cities such as Richmond, Montgomery, and New Orleans, Tallahassee was not crucial to the war, a fact that may account for the city not having a much greater focus on the Lost Cause. The attempt by many organizations in the period immediately following the war in other southern cities, to promote the life and contributions of individuals such as Robert E. Lee does not appear to have extended into Tallahassee. There are no statues commemorating or celebrating Lee or any other Confederate officers except for a single historical marker located a few hundred yards south of the Georgia border on U.S. Highway 319.

As a Confederate capital, Tallahassee’s support and contributions to the southern cause are reflected in the soldiers who died in battle and the women and children left behind to continue on as best they could through four long and difficult years. However, the pro-southern sentiments are somewhat ambiguous and far from being glorified if even honored, as one may expect from a Confederate state. Instead, the focus remains on particular events that occurred during the four year conflict and the memory of the Florida soldiers who served with great pride and dignity when called upon. Exhibits that discuss the Confederate victory at Olustee, partially fought by two Florida units, concentrate on the dedication and sacrifices many of these soldiers made in their attempts to protect their homes and families. Hence, a comparison of public memorials in Tallahassee then Richmond for instance, suggests a greater emphasis in remembrance of the individual contributions from common soldiers versus those of highly-regarded Confederate leaders.

In terms of remembering Emancipation the city of Tallahassee honors this event in different ways. The department of state’s re-enactment indicates the incorporation of Emancipation into official memory. However, the use of re-enactors also distorts history. The spirit of Emancipation, in contrast, is kept alive at the Walker-Ford celebration, which is an example of an expression of vernacular memory. Public historians need to grapple with both if they are to work with the city’s residents in
developing an understanding of the meaning of Emancipation and its relation to the Civil War.

The Civil War left Tallahassee untouched. There were no battlefields from which to gather and bury soldiers. There were no buildings lost to destruction and left to later be rebuilt. It had escaped the Civil War, with very little if any physical damage. The absence of physical ruptures led the citizens of Tallahassee to develop separate commemorations that enunciate very different interpretations regarding the meaning of the Civil War for this community and ultimately compete to be the dominant public memory. This divide is made even clearer when the difference lies in the commemoration of the same event, one by a local community center, and the other by a state-funded institution. Still other institutions choose to ignore the topic of memory and commemoration in their presentations of the war; a method that has for the most part avoided major controversy within the city. Together, in their own unique form, these celebrations and exhibits add relevance to the greater understanding of Civil War memory in Tallahassee.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author, Esther Hernandez Berumen, was born and raised in Inglewood, California before moving to Nampa, Idaho at age thirteen. Esther completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in American Studies with a minor in Spanish from the University of Idaho in May 2003. Prior to entering Florida State University, Esther worked at Miami Children’s Museum in Miami, Florida and twice interned at the National Museum of American History in Washington D.C. In the Fall of 2007 she began graduate work towards a Master’s degree in Historical Administration and Public History offered through FSU’s Department of History. In the summer of 2008, she was selected to intern as a Museum Associate at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington D.C. in the Museum Exhibits Department.

Upon her graduation in Spring 2009, she plans to pursue a career in the museum field focusing on collections management and archives. Esther currently resides in Tallahassee, Florida and in her free time enjoys dancing, traveling, playing and watching sports, and spending time at the beach.