



STAFF PHOTOS BY ASHLEE CULVERHOUSE

Jim Ogden, left, Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park historian, leads a group of Civil War historians on a tour of key historical sites in Chattanooga National Cemetery on Saturday.

Civil War in focus

Historians tour area sites ahead of 150th battle anniversaries

BY TODD SOUTH
STAFF WRITER

A dozen historical experts on the western half of the Civil War met in Chattanooga last week to discuss research on the conflict and walk the historic sites themselves.

John Marszalek, a retired history professor at Mississippi State University, co-founded the Historians of the Civil War Western Theater with Michael Ballard as an informal way for published historians to share ideas and research on the war.

Marszalek and others in the group said Chattanooga's upcoming battle anniversaries offer the public a unique connection to significant history near their homes.

"When you talk about the Civil War, Chattanooga was a key area," Marszalek said. "The battles were absolutely crucial. They opened the door to the entire South."

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga professor Kit Rushing said most of the war's battles in the East were well-documented because journalists and photographers easily could travel by rail to the sites.

But the western theater, which includes Tennessee, Georgia and Mississippi, didn't get as much press, even though the battles were critical to how the war developed and eventually ended.

In June 2013, the 150th anniversary — or sesquicentennial — of the Civil War battles fought in the Chattanooga and North Georgia areas begins. Union campaigns in Tullahoma, Tenn., in June 1863 led to later battles



Jim Ogden points out a location on a map to a group of Civil War historians.

at Chattanooga and Chickamauga, and at Kennesaw Mountain in Georgia, before troops reached Atlanta.

On Saturday, the historian group toured Chattanooga National Cemetery, established to bury war dead during the battles, and Orchard Knob and Missionary Ridge with Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park historian Jim Ogden.

Kennesaw State University professor Brian Wills said historians and Civil War enthusiasts from around the world will travel to this area for the anniversaries.

"The eyes of the country, the eyes of the world, will be on us," Wills said.

He encouraged locals not to miss opportunities to see the sites firsthand.

"Nothing substitutes for going to the ground," he said. "Go to the battlefields of Chickamauga, what

you're able to see in Chattanooga, then follow the Atlanta campaign to Kennesaw and on to Atlanta."

Though study of the war and its effects is a daily passion for those in the association, the anniversary gives wider exposure for the scholars to share their zeal for the period.

Marszalek said Civil War historians love to play "what if?" and Chattanooga provides a lot of "what-if?" opportunities.

One notable historical figure among many began his ascension with the battles of the Scenic City.

"He gains his reputation in Mississippi at Vicksburg, but then what he does here at Chattanooga really firms that up," Marszalek said. "There wouldn't have been a [Ulysses S.] Grant without Chattanooga."

Contact staff writer Todd South at tsouth@timesfreepress.com or 423-757-6347.



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History tour

Jim Ogden, left above, Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park historian, leads a group of Civil War historians on a tour of key historical sites in Orchard Knob on Saturday. Below, they visit the National Cemetery.



