



## Markers illustrate overlooked stories

Historical Society offers a 'broader' Civil War picture

By [Jeffry Scott](#)

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The state of Georgia has spent about \$5 million the past 60 years on more than 900 Civil War historical markers. They tell the story of battles between Confederates and Yankees and Union Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman's conquest of Atlanta and March to the Sea.

For the 150th anniversary of the war, the Georgia Historical Society went behind the battle lines with a dozen new markers illustrating the overlooked stories of African-Americans, women and civilians caught up in the war, as well as forgotten horrors of the war itself.

For the first time there's a marker at Ebenezer Creek in Rincon, where hundreds of fugitive African-American slaves drowned while following the Union Army during its March to the Sea.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution caught up with W. Todd Groce, president of the Georgia Historical Society, which is leading the effort to erect new markers, and asked him about it.

**Q: Do you look at these new markers as revisionist history?**

**A:** These new markers offer a broader, more inclusive picture of the war than has been traditionally presented in historical markers. The older markers mostly focus on battles and therefore tell only part of the story. What emerges in the new markers is a broader, more complex and complete view of the war and its impact on all Georgians, white and black, male and female, soldiers, civilians and slaves.

**Q: Were there some events best forgotten? Or maybe a better way to ask this: Are there stories to tell that you couldn't have told 30 or 50 years ago?**

**A:** Fifty years ago our understanding of the war was not as broad as it is today. We know now that war is more than just what happens on the battlefield, that it affects all of society. Also, because race relations are different today, we can tell stories about African-Americans and the central role that race played in the conflict in a way unimaginable before the civil rights movement.

**Q: Are these markers, in a way, as much civil rights markers as Civil War markers?**

**A:** Those markers that tell stories about African-Americans actively struggling to secure their freedom certainly are.

**Q: Do you think there is any danger of the South forgetting the Civil War?**

**A:** Probably the marker in Dalton that told the story of the two regiments of United States Colored Troops. These

men were mostly from Georgia, they had escaped from slavery, and now they had enlisted in the Army of the United States to destroy slavery and free others. They knew if captured by the Confederates they'd be returned to slavery — and that's exactly what happened to them. Their courage, their determination to prove their manhood and their worthiness to be citizens is not only inspiring, but the story of these black Southerners makes us rethink how we understand the Civil War.

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