

Perspectives

Focusing on What's Important

by W. Todd Groce, Ph.D.

IN MY LAST COLUMN I DISCUSSED THE DRASTIC CUTS IN funding proposed for the Georgia Historical Society in the state mid year FY09 and FY10 budgets. This funding, which is used for the historical marker program and our library and archives, amounted to 15% of our total operating revenue. Its loss would have been a severe blow.

Many of you heard our plea for help and swung into action. Thanks to you and the hard work of our board and staff we successfully restored 75% of our state support. Considering where we began—a complete elimination—this is good news. But we must still absorb a 25% cut, a problem compounded by a corresponding 25% decline in our endowment. All of this has forced us to scrutinize our operating budget carefully to find ways to reduce spending.

Beginning in January we reduced our workforce by 14%, cut library and archives hours by 25%, and restricted or eliminated the frequency and scale of our publications, acquisitions, programs, and other services. By making the tough decisions early we will end the year with a balanced budget and on firm financial footing.

Despite these cutbacks we continue to succeed. Private financial support is still strong and fund raising is right on track. With the recent acquisition of the Judge Griffin Bell papers (see the "Inside GHS" story in this issue) our archival holdings continue to grow and visitation to our library and archives has risen dramatically. In February over 800 people attended the lecture on Johnny Mercer, thousands of school children participated in the 2009 Georgia Days educational programs, and nearly 400 people attended our Annual Birthday Bash and Awards Gala. Membership is at an all-time record of nearly 6,000.

This level of interest tells me that the Georgia Historical Society is no less important to the people we serve just because of tough economic times. Indeed just the opposite is true: history becomes more important during difficult times as we seek a greater historical understanding of the challenging days in which we live. If anything, GHS is more relevant now than ever.

The Georgia Historical Society has met and overcome challenges before. Two world wars, the Great Depression, and General Sherman couldn't stop us and neither will this. I am confident our cost-saving measures, along with your continued support, will help us to weather this latest storm, and that the Georgia Historical Society will emerge stronger and better positioned to continue our 170-year-old mission to educate the future about the past.

To all who have renewed your membership, donated to annual giving, participated in our corporate campaign, made a special gift for operating or endowment, or who took the time to contact the General Assembly on our behalf, thank you. *G*

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