

New historical marker commemorates Confederate Powder Works

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Women and politics are two things rarely mentioned on historical markers of the Civil War era, but Augusta now has one that tells of both.

A new historical marker, "Explosion at the Confederate Powder Works," was presented Saturday in a ceremony at the Augusta Canal, on the 147th anniversary of the explosion.

William Hanley, the historic marker coordinator for the Georgia Historical Society, explained that the marker is one of 11 new ones in the state commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. The new markers were commissioned to interpret previously unrepresented elements of the war.

"Politics have come a long way since the Civil War," District 1 Commissioner Matt Aitken said with a smile. "It's my honor to accept this marker today for the city of Augusta."

Located on the southwest side of the Eve Street Bridge at the Augusta Canal, the marker commemorates a large explosion that destroyed the granulating building of the Augusta Powder Works on Aug. 27, 1864, killing eight men and one boy.

After the ceremony, approximately 20 people boarded the Petersburg Boat for a canal tour in which guide Julie Boone explained Augusta's role in the Civil War.

Boone told how Augusta was selected by Confederate Col. George Rains as the site to build the powder works, which consisted of 28 buildings spanning 2 miles along the canal. Augusta Powder Works are the only buildings ever constructed by the government of the Confederate States of America.

While only men worked in the powder works building because of the hot fires and strong smell of sulfur, women and children worked in the other parts of the industry, testing ammunition at the arsenal and making cloth at the textile mill. Poor pay and the danger of possible explosions led the women to go on strike, reveals the historic marker. Boone said many safety precautions were established to prevent a spark that could cause an explosion, but several explosions happened anyway, with the largest being in 1864. The cause of the explosion remains unknown because no witnesses survived.

"It's a great tour. I learned a part of Augusta that I didn't know anything about before," said Sheryl Kenoyer, of

Aiken.

"It's wonderful. It's the same stuff you learn in the museum, but she brought it to life and you could see it right there," said Nancy Jackson, who came from Forrest City, N.C., for the tour.

Take a tour

WHAT: Boat tour observing the Civil War sesquicentennial

WHEN: 10 a.m. Saturday, 1:30 and 4:30 p.m. Sunday, beginning Sept. 3

COST: \$12.50

MORE INFORMATION: Call (706) 823-0440, Ext. 4.

Text on marker

Explosion at the Confederate Powder Works

In August, 1864, a violent explosion destroyed the granulating building of the Augusta Powder Works, one of the 28 buildings of the Confederacy's massive gunpowder mill along Augusta Canal. Eight men and a boy died when 18,000 pounds of gunpowder exploded in one of the most lethal industrial accidents in the Civil War South. This, along with poor pay, prompted women at the facility to go on strike the following October. With many men away in the army, an increasing number of women and children were pulled into the workforce. The unsuccessful strike was one of many at war-time industrial facilities across Georgia, where pay was low and working conditions often dangerous.

Erected for the Civil War 150 commemoration by the Georgia Historical Society, the Georgia Department of Economic Development, and the Augusta Canal Authority.