

# Perspectives

## *If Not Us, Then Who?*

by W. Todd Groce, Ph.D.

LIKE EVERYONE ELSE THE GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY is beginning to feel the pinch of the current economic crisis. I say pinch, because so far it is only in our state government funding that we have seen any dramatic reduction.

Fortunately individual and corporate donors still value history education. Our 2008 annual giving and corporate campaigns under the leadership of Vince Dooley and Howard Morrison have been a success. Membership is still on track. Ticket sales for the gala are brisk. And our endowment, while down 22 percent, has fared better than most.

Our State support, however, has been deeply slashed. We've been hit with an immediate 10 percent reduction in historical marker funding, and the Secretary of State has abruptly eliminated nearly \$75,000 for our library and archives. And the worst is yet to come: the Governor has recommended the elimination of our entire appropriation from the State, \$300,000, 15 percent of our current budget, in the next budget cycle.

What does this mean for you? It means limited access to history: severely curtailed research hours; no more historical markers will be erected; the end of any hope Georgia had to participate in the national 150th anniversary of the Civil War; the loss of billions of tourist dollars which might have helped to improve our economy and create jobs. It means a citizenry less educated, less informed about its past, less prepared for the future.

To cut history is a monumental mistake. It robs our state of billions of dollars visitors spend exploring the past. The \$1.2 billion pumped into Savannah alone by tourists eager to experience the city's history is evidence enough of history's economic power.

Moreover, to cut history is to rob future generations of the tools needed to compete in the global market place and the education needed to function as citizens of our republic. History develops and hones writing and analytical skills, instills an understanding of our own and other cultures, offers great leaders to emulate, puts events in context, and teaches us what it means to be an American. (If people expect "to be their own governors," observed James Madison, then they must "arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.")

The State of Georgia has a vested interest in telling its story to its citizens and visitors, alike. By operating as leanly as possible the Georgia Historical Society is doing its part to grow our economy and educate the people of Georgia. But we can't cut our way to prosperity. We need your continued financial commitment and that of the State. And make no mistake, politicians respond to pressure from the people of Georgia. Please join us in urging the General Assembly (where we still have many allies and supporters) to restore funding for history education and tourism. Turn to Stan Deaton's column on page 13 for more information.

Because if those of us who love and value history don't advocate for it, no one else will. *G*

*W. Todd Groce is President and CEO of the Georgia Historical Society. He can be reached at [wtgroce@georgiahistory.com](mailto:wtgroce@georgiahistory.com)*

