

Perspectives

The Irrelevance of Location

by W. Todd Groce, Ph.D.

I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MANY CONVERSATIONS I USED TO HAVE that started out this way. "Where is the Georgia Historical Society headquartered?" When I answer "Savannah," the inevitable reply was, "How can you be the *Georgia* Historical Society if you aren't in Atlanta?"

Or how about the comment I overheard following a lecture I gave in Newnan: "Why do they get to call themselves the Georgia Historical Society? They're not even based in Atlanta."

Let's put aside the fact that GHS was founded before there was an Atlanta, let alone before it was even the capital. None of that changes the fact that, because we aren't based in Georgia's capital city, we had to go out of our way to prove that we were statewide. GHS offers more programming across the state, and has more of a presence on the local level through our affiliate chapters, publications, and historical markers, than any comparable organization in Georgia, and still we were not recognized as "statewide."

Fortunately, comments like those above are increasingly rare. GHS has nearly 200 affiliate chapters, erected 130 historical markers, collects and offers for research archival material from all over Georgia, publishes articles and books about all of Georgia history, and has a board that is 50 percent composed of non-Savannahians. Clearly, we've managed to counter the argument that we have to be in Atlanta to be statewide.

Furthermore, technology is giving us a new and more powerful presence. Our partnership with Georgia Public Broadcasting and with the web-based *New Georgia Encyclopedia* and Digital Library of Georgia, and, of course, our own soon-to-be launched Web site and its accompanying online public access catalog mean that we are no longer restricted to physically being in one place at a time. Technology allows us to be everywhere at once. And using it is more cost effective than the traditional, labor-intensive method of trying to hold programs in every corner of the state.

That's not to say we aren't still physically moving around Georgia. Our staff logs thousands of miles every year giving programs and lectures to our affiliates and civic clubs, and three of our four board meetings are outside Savannah. Our premier scholarly program, *Profiles in Leadership*, has been held in Atlanta for the past eight years. And of course the historical marker program and the *Georgia Historical Quarterly* may be the most visible evidence of our statewide presence and commitment to all of Georgia's history. It's no wonder that two-thirds of our membership is now outside of Savannah.

The time has come when we no longer need to think in terms of location to define what it means to be statewide. Technology has transcended the old physical barriers. And happily your membership and financial support have helped us to get here. *g*

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