

Perspectives

A Priceless Partnership

by W. Todd Groce, Ph.D.

IT IS A WELL KNOWN AXIOM THAT AN EDUCATED CITIZENRY is essential to the survival of a republic. Every political philosopher from Plato to Jefferson has stressed the need for the citizens of a free government to possess knowledge of literature, philosophy, and history. Only when people are educated is liberty secure. That's why education is an essential function of state government.

For almost 175 years, the Georgia Historical Society has been actively engaged in the process of creating educated citizens. As Georgia's oldest cultural institution, GHS has successfully promoted a better understanding of our past—and done it at considerably less cost than if the state carried the burden alone.

Since taking a voluntary privatization of its library and archives over ten years ago, GHS has shifted more than 75 percent of the expense for this vital service from the state to the private sector. In other words, if the state were paying today what it actually costs to operate the GHS library and archives—as it once did ten years ago—it would be spending nearly \$500,000 per year rather than the \$98,000 it annually appropriates for this purpose.

This is not the only area where GHS is saving taxpayer money. When the state privatized the historical marker program and turned its operation over to GHS, it cut its annual expenditure—approximately \$120,000—in half. Likewise, when GHS resumed editorial management of its *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, the state shifted an additional \$100,000 in expenses to the private sector.

Through our private-public partnership, then, GHS saves the state annually nearly \$750,000. The government funds once spent on history are today redirected into other state services.

GHS is glad to shoulder this additional responsibility. But we can't go it alone—nor should we. Neither the private sector nor the state should be expected to singlehandedly undertake such a vital mission. It takes the resources, expertise, and commitment of both if we are to realize our common goal of creating an educated citizenry.

As the economy worsens and state budgets tighten, there is increased temptation to see history as expendable. But the state has a duty to preserve its past, if for no other reason than for self-preservation. Future generations cannot be expected to solve the problems of tomorrow or truly appreciate our economic and governmental systems without knowledge of the struggles and sacrifices made to secure, expand, and defend our liberties.

This republic will crumble if we do not continue to value our cultural institutions. As a private organization with a public mission, the Georgia Historical Society has educated Georgians about their history for nearly two centuries and saved taxpayer money in the process. But we need the ongoing support of the state if the job is to get done. No matter how expensive this may seem, we cannot afford the alternative. *G*

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