Funds Sought to Preserve Battleground as U. S. Park

Land Purchase Urged for Chalmette Shrine

Wanted: $500,000.

That amount will be needed to fully preserve the site of one of the most important battles fought on United States soil—the Battle of New Orleans.

Some of this famed battlefield, where Andrew Jackson's Kentucky and Tennessee militia and Louisiana volunteers routed Pakenham's British forces on January 8, 1815, now forms part of Chalmette National Historical Park, only national park in the state.

The park today consists of two separate plots of land totaling approximately 30 acres. One plot includes what was formerly known as Chalmette National Cemetery, the other is the site of the memorial monument.

The national defense and veterans affairs committee of the Association of Commerce estimates that to properly develop the park so it would include most of the land upon which the Battle of New Orleans was fought, an additional 210 acres is needed.

This new land would include 96 acres lying between the cemetery and the monument (it was on this land that Pakenham was mortally wounded as he attempted to rally his wavering forces), and 72 acres east of the monument.

The additional land and buildings on it would cost $500,000 to acquire and a bill appropriating that amount will be introduced in the state Legislature during its current session by the association committee, which is headed by Aline Legendre, prominent American legionnaire.

TELLS OF PLANS

Why should the state spend money on a national park?

The policy of the federal government is not to purchase land for national park purposes. It leaves that to state or other governmental bodies. Once it has the land, it will develop and maintain it.

It is estimated that in the immediate years ahead the federal government would spend several million dollars on the park.

Clarence L. Johnson, native Mississippian and custodian of the park, says that the government plans to build an administration building and a museum, would construct a circular tour road to allow visitors to get to all points of interest, and would erect signs and markers.

A staff of historians and guides would be on hand to tell the visitor as much of the story of the park and what it commemorates as they would care to listen to.

Jackson's defense line, which extended from the Mississippi river to where formerly an impervious swamp was located, would be delineated and his infantry and artillery positions be recorded. The British positions would likewise be marked.

The spot where Pakenham fell mortally wounded, so difficult to reach, would be easily accessible.

The museum would contain all the information available on the historical battle, which assured the western development of the United States. In the museum would be sufficient charts and pictures to complete the picture of the battle which the visitor would obtain by visiting the battlefield.

REMOVE VILLAGE

Mr. Johnson says that the park as envisioned would include parts of the old McCarty, Chalmette and Bienvenue or Four Oaks plantations. Practically all of the land is now owned by the Southern Railway System.

To develop the park it will be necessary to do away with a small, largely Negro, settlement known as Faedeville, where there are 38 private holdings.

Back in 1937-1938, the department of conservation obtained options on all the property in the village.

The principal attractions of the park as it now stands are the national cemetery and the memorial monument.

The cemetery is the final resting place of four veterans of the War of 1812, some 12,500 veterans of the War Between the States and approximately 2500 veterans of the Spanish-American War.

World War I and II and members of their families.

One British sailor, who died in place here during World War II, is buried halfway between where Pakenham was wounded and where he died.

Poring over old records, Mr. Johnson discovered that in the area adjoining the cemetery are the unmarked graves of some 7000 persons. It was in this area that the Freedman's Bureau operated a burial plot before the cemeteries were deeded to the federal government in 1868.

The monument, an obelisk of marble and granite, was started in 1925 by the state to commemorate the American victory in the Battle of New Orleans. Work, interrupted by the War Between the States, at which time the monument was only 60 feet high, the monument, now 100 feet, inches high, was completed in 1908 under a congressional appropriation.

WAY CLEARED

Custody of the area for many years was in the hands of the United Daughters of 1776 and 1812, but in 1930 they relinquished it to the war department, which had been administering the site as a national cemetery.

In 1933, both cemetery and monument areas were transferred to the National Park Service. In August, 1939, the holdings were redesignated as Chalmette National Historical Park by act of Congress.

The act of 1939 limited expansion of the park to not more than 500 acres and authorized the secretary of the interior to accept donations of land for the park.

This act culminated many years of effort by patriotic leaders in New Orleans. Acquisition of the additional land, money for which will be sought from the state, will complete their efforts.

Still undetermined in plans for the park's expansion, should the state agree to purchase the land is an old plantation-style house on the river end of the park.

This beautiful century-old structure, known as the Beauregard House, was built around 1840 under plans drawn by James Gallier, Sr., famed architect for the old French Opera House and the St. Louis hotel. Rene Beauregard, son of the general, lived in the house, although it was not built for him.

The Historical American Buildings Survey listed it as one of the architecturally outstanding structures in this area. Eight columns grace the front and a like number the rear of the building, and it has a huge central chimney which serves eight fireplaces.

It is Mr. Johnson's hope that the fine old structure will be renovated by the park service and included in the facilities of the new and larger Chalmette National Historical Park.

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The two shaded strips on this map show the present area of Chalmette National Park. Acquisition of the intervening 98-acre tract of land (Priority No. 1) is considered the most urgent of the program, to link the present two units into a single park. Next in importance are the tracts indicated by Priority No. 2 (40 acres) and Priority No. 3 (72 acres).

The old Beauregard house, built in 1840, is in one corner of the grounds, may be repaired and put to use under the proposed plans.

A scene in the present grounds. White lines show boundary of land which would be bought for completion of the park.