

At the annual awards dinner of the Battle of Nashville Preservation Society, outgoing President J.T. Thompson, left, and Incoming President Jim Kay, center, visit with Robert Hicks, author of 'The Widow of the South.'

Photo by Erin O'Brien

strumental in the preservation of such landmarks as Fort Negley, Shy's Hill and Confederate Redoubt No. 1, but its work is not yet complete.

Referring to future plans of the group, which include efforts to preserve stone walls and other Civil War-era landmarks being threatened by development, Kay told his audience that BONPS is "going places."

And as a result, he hopes the area's Civil War landmarks are not.

Author determined to make sure Franklin battle won't be forgotten or ignored

By Erin O'Brien
Staff Writer

One of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War occurred less than 20 miles south of Davidson County, yet walking through the streets of Franklin, Tenn., few would ever know.

And for just that reason, author Robert Hicks made the decision to write "The Widow of the South," a best-selling novel based on the true story of what transpired in the days leading up to and years following the Battle of Franklin at Carnton Plantation, the home of John and Carrie McGavock.

On November 30, 1864, 9,500 soldiers - 7,000 of whom were fighting for the Confederate army - were killed, wounded or captured in a battle that lasted just five hours. Six Confederate generals were also lost that day; eight were wounded, and one was captured by Union forces. One Federal general also was wounded.

Historians have described the battle to Hicks as being "like the first 20 minutes of (the film) 'Saving Private Ryan'" - except that it lasted a full five hours.

In the wake of the battle, the McGavock home was converted to a Confederate army hospital, and the family and its slaves found themselves tending to the casualties alongside doctors and surgeons. Today that home still stands and its land serves as the resting place of nearly 1,500 soldiers - one of the largest private military cemeteries in the nation.

Carrie McGavock devoted her life to tending to the cemetery until her death in 1905. Eighty-two years later, Hicks was asked to sit on the board of directors of Carnton, then a struggling house-museum.

Upon learning more about the history of the place and

Carrie McGavock's role in the aftermath of the Battle of Franklin, Hicks decided that it was due time to tell her story. Up until that point, he noted, only fictional figures - think Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler - seemed to be telling the story of the Tennessee Campaign of 1863 to the nation and the world.

Hicks shared his motivation for writing the story last week at the Battle of Nashville Preservation Society's annual awards banquet at Travellers Rest Plantation.

The author said that when he moved to Franklin in 1974, "the Battle of Franklin was all around me," yet between Pizza Huts and other modern day establishments, the only proof of what had happened in the town some 110 years prior lie in the street signs bearing names of dead generals.

"The Battle of Franklin was there but it wasn't there," Hicks said, puzzled at how today, in Gettysburg, Pa., it is impossible for the area's inhabitants and visitors to ignore what occurred there in the summer of 1863, yet an equally if not more tragic battle that took place in Franklin the following year "is very easy to ignore."

It was that realization that peaked Hick's interest in preserving the story of that "cataclysmic event" and Carnton's role in that point in history for current and future generations.

"To make it relevant - that was my goal, that's why I wrote the book," he said.

Incoming BONPS President Jim Kay is familiar with the lack of interest in the area's Civil War grounds. Having grown up on a Civil War battlefield in south Nashville, Kay said he has always loved, studied and cared about such sites, many of which "are now back-

yards and sideyards."

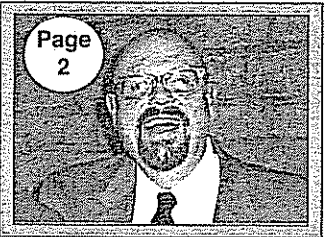
But when working to preserve Nashville's historic lands, Kay said he sometimes encounters the nonchalance of others in the form of phrases and inquiries like "That was 1864," "Why do you care?" and "Big deal."

But it is a big deal, Kay insists, because not only are these sites important to our nation's - as well as his own - history, but also "if I don't do it, if you don't do it, it'll be destroyed," he told those gathered last Thursday night at Travellers Rest.

At least 400 other Nashville residents share these sentiments and are working, as members of the BONPS, to preserve Davidson County's Civil War sites.

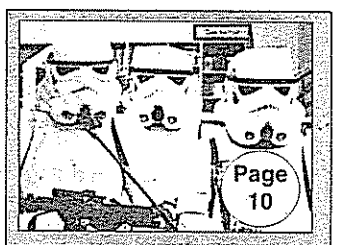
To date the group has been in-

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