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The original item was published from 6/20/2008 2:41:41 PM to 7/7/2008 12:00:04 AM.

Press Releases and News

Posted on: June 19, 2008

[ARCHIVED] Preserving a Piece of History in Madison

Suwannee River Water Management District (District) officials announced the commencement of a large-scale historic preservation project in Madison County on the plantation mansion and grounds once occupied by Governor George F. Drew during the 19th century.



The project is funded with historic preservation grant assistance provided by the Bureau of Historic Preservation, Division of Historic Resources, Florida Department of State and the District.

The project includes performing an in-depth archaeological survey of the ruins; locating subsurface archaeological material; and documenting the very large brick ruins of the mansion and its cistern.

Extensive historic and cartographic research concerning Governor Drew, the history of Ellaville in relationship to Drew, and related Drew-owned businesses and transportation systems associated with the Suwannee and Withlacoochee rivers will also be completed.

Boundaries of the Governor Drew Mansion Cemetery and its grave locations will be located using ground penetrating radar, and thereafter mapped using a global positioning system (GPS). All tombstones will be noted, recorded and marked for future avoidance. Each of these resources will be evaluated with reference to specific criteria for possible inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

Edwin McCook, SRWMD public use coordinator and the contract's administrator says, "The historic resources located within District lands are a non-renewable resource of growing importance to our community. Intact historic ruins which are preserved within a rural setting, such as the Governor Drew mansion site, are especially well suited for preservation and public interpretation."

The contract will be executed by Bland & Associates, Inc. (BAI), an archaeological and historic preservation consulting firm with offices in Jacksonville, Florida, Atlanta, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina.

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In regard to the project, BAI Senior Historian Sidney Johnston explains, “Governor Drew played a pivotal role in the history of Florida, and his mansion was a silent witness to this story. We look forward to documenting this historic treasure. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the residents of Madison County and SRWMD officials in advance for their cooperation. It is an honor and a pleasure to execute this contract on their behalf.”

The two-story mansion, surrounded by formal gardens, was built in the late 1860's and was one of the first homes in the area to have modern facilities. It was destroyed by fire in 1970, but the ruins still remain.

During the 1870s, George F. Drew amassed a small fortune from his sawmill and lumber business in Ellaville. He became popularly known as “Millionaire Drew,” a moniker that gained him recognition as an important North Florida businessman.

In the early-1870s, Drew was appointed a Madison County commissioner, and in 1876 he won the gubernatorial election following a hotly contested vote recount. As governor, Drew played a major role in state and national political events that eventually led to the “Compromise of 1877” and the end of Reconstruction in Florida. Drew counted among his successes the creation of the State Bureau of Immigration, which helped promote settlement. The Florida State Grange was chartered with Drew's support, and his administration also oversaw the first implementation of county and city boards of health.

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Posted on: December 11, 2019
