

Fighting on The Tennessee River

Benton County Civil War Tours coming this spring

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Beginning in the Spring of 2009, Birdsong Marina will conduct daily "Benton County: Civil War Tour" up the Tennessee River.

Birdsong is now designated a "Civil War Site" by the State of Tennessee, something Bob Keast, owner, has been working on for quite some time with State Representative Steve K. McDaniel, president of the Tennessee Civil War Association and the Tennessee Historical Commission, Tennessee Department of Transportation, the Department of Tourism and the private sector to promote the history of the Civil War.

General Nathan Bedford Forrest was involved in several skirmishes from Memphis, to Camden, Eva and Parkers Crossroads. The covered boat tour will begin with a brief introduction on river safety and of the three locations on the Tennessee River that are important to the interpretation of The Battle of Johnsonville.

Johnsonville was a Federal depot that held millions of dollars in supplies, which were thought to be supplying Union General William Tecumseh Sherman's troops. At any given time, the entire bank would have been lined with barges and steamboat puffers awaiting goods to ship downstream to Paducah or upriver to Alabama.

The river tour will follow the route of Forrest's cavalry, which would travel about 20 miles a

day, heading south to Florence, Ala. Beginning at the Marina, the tour boat will continue on to Pilot Knob and back giving the guests an overview of the Battle of Johnsonville that is designed to familiarize those interested in Tennessee's history along the river in Benton County. It will be part of the Tennessee Civil War trails program.

"We're elated because we have been networking with the states of Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and the Carolinas to design a multi-state tour wherever there was a battle, skirmish or marker designating a Civil War site," said Keast.

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) is erecting markers at Civil War historical sites. These may be fortifications, buildings, encampments, or other material remains of the war. Other sites may include cemeteries of those who died in combat, monuments that commemorate their sacrifices or museums that contain artifacts of the Civil War.

Visitors will have these markers mapped out and will be able to pick up literature and point the way to the next site along the entire state of Tennessee. "Tennessee has been blessed with many points of interest concerning the Civil War," Keast explained. "We are hoping to bring more tourism to Benton County with our new boat tour. This is an opportunity to educate visitors as to Benton County's history, encouraging them to return. Our goal is



DESIGNATION—The Tennessee Civil War Trails Marker is pointed out by Bob Keast, designating Birdsong Marina as a Civil War site. **FORREST**— (At right) A painting depicts Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest at Parker's Crossroads during his March to Florence.



for people to come, eat, sleep, shop and tour, having fun and spending money in our county. The more people who visit will make for a better economy."

Continuing, Keast said, "We

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are also going to encourage visitors to go to Danville Landing and take the ferry up to Ft. Donaldson National Memorial. For more information about the upcoming "Benton County: Civil War Tour", or any of the other many opportunities for fun and recreation in Benton County, contact Keast at (731) 584-7880 or visit Birdsong Marina's Web site at www.Birdsong.com.

As this interview was coming to an end, Keast was informed of a family of five who came in to see the introductory tour about Birdsong. When asked how they came to hear about Birdsong Marina and the Pearl Museum, the gentleman responded, "We

live in Memphis and have heard a lot about this place, we've just never stopped. Today we are

heading toward Nashville and decided to see what you have to offer."