

## Group seeking funds for Missouri Civil War memorial at Vicksburg battle site



*Photo courtesy of the National Park Service*

The Missouri State Memorial in Vicksburg National Military Park needs about \$370,000 in maintenance and repairs, the National Park Service says. It was dedicated in October 1917.

By **RUDI KELLER**

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On May 22, 1863, Union soldiers of the 6th, 8th and 11th Missouri Infantry regiments took part in assaults on the Stockade Redan strongpoint of the Confederate lines at Vicksburg, Miss., defended by Missourians who had been fighting for the South since 1861.

Those soldiers are frozen in battle in the bronze relief images adorning the Missouri State Memorial at Vicksburg National Military Park. The panels in the granite monument flank a bronze angel by sculptor Victor Holm titled “The Spirit of the Republic.”

In all, 27 Union and 15 Confederate units from Missouri participated in the fighting, which ended July 4, 1863, after a six-week siege.

The monument, dedicated Oct. 17, 1917, is showing signs of its age. The National Park Service estimates the cost of maintenance and repairs at \$370,000. News that Congress has approved \$10 million to match donated funds for major maintenance in national parks is spurring an effort by the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War to obtain the money.

Larry Dietzel of Columbia said the group is hoping the state, which spent \$40,000 originally to place the monument, can provide money. Dietzel is one of three members working on the project. With a March 31 deadline to compete for the federal funding, Dietzel said the task is daunting.

“We are right at the beginnings of this,” said Dietzel, a past commander of SUVCW Tiger Camp 432. “If the state would say, ‘That is something we built, we should take care of it,’ it would save a lot of work.”

Lawmakers and Gov. Jay Nixon are preparing to spend \$362 million from a bond issue on state repair needs, including \$75 million for work around the Capitol. Nixon, asked last week about the Vicksburg monument, said there was no room for it on the list of projects.

“Of the capital needs that we have in our state, with all due deference and respect to those that died in the battle between the states, I’ve still got cracked steps in the back sidewalk, and that’s a monument a lot closer to Missouri than Vicksburg is,” Nixon said. “In the hierarchy of needs, it’s not there.”

There are memorials for Confederate troops from 14 states and Union troops from 18 states at Vicksburg. The Missouri memorial was the only one dedicated to troops from both sides of the conflict until a Kentucky memorial was dedicated in 2001.

“The challenge of maintaining these monuments is pretty intense, so where we can we try to partner with other entities, including the states that actually put the monument here,” said Bill Justice, acting superintendent at Vicksburg. Several monuments are in “fairly serious need” of work, he said.

For the Missouri monument, the needed repairs include broken bronze work and discolored and cracking stones. Neither the Sons of Union Veterans nor its counterpart organization, Sons of Confederate Veterans, have the fundraising power to meet the March 31 deadline. The Confederate heritage groups “have just barely started talking” about it, said Darrell Maples of Jefferson City, the state division commander.

The state’s role in maintaining the memorial is a judgment call, Maples said. “We put it there as taxpayers so many years ago, so there is a certain responsibility for upkeep.”

Dietzel sent information to Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, last year. “It is one of those things that nobody knows about it until somebody brings it up,” Schaefer said. “And the question becomes, what is the obligation to maintain it?”

Both Schaefer and state Rep. Craig Redmond, R-Canton and chairman of the House Appropriations-Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources Committee, said they were willing to consider the request. Redmond's committee gets the first look at spending for state parks and historic sites.

"These are things that need to be preserved," Redmond said. "I think we definitely need to put it on the table and weigh it out."

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