

Brothers of the Order:

There may be some confusion still regarding the status of The Olustee Monument Commission's proposal to erect a monument to the Union Soldiers who fought and died at the Battle of Olustee in Florida.

First, the State of Florida, through its duly appointed administrators and elected officials, has twice approved (in writing in May and November 2013) our proposal to erect a monument to the Union soldiers who fought and died at the Battle of Olustee. The approvals have never been withdrawn and remain current.

The approvals granted our request to place the monument on the grounds of the 3 acre state owned property known as the Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park.

Subsequent to both approvals, individuals and groups opposed to having a Union monument placed within the confines of the state park where 3 Confederate monuments now exist, sought to reverse the decision allow a Union monument.

Unable to persuade executive branch officers and administrators that the proposed Union monument should be barred from state land an effort to frustrate our project with legislation was introduced in the Florida General Assembly. The bill to undermine state administrators' approval of our monument was not well received and died in committees. There is no reason to believe that any such future attempt will succeed.

The effort to block our Union monument received wide publicity throughout Florida and nationally through newspapers such as the *New York Times*. We anticipate that our efforts and success will continue to be a story of statewide and national interest.

Those who have opposed the Union monument at Olustee have always claimed that the 3 acres (or title thereto) that constitute Florida's first state park were given to the State of Florida by the United Daughters of Confederacy and that to place a Union monument on that land would be a sacrilege. Such arguments have always been factually, legally and morally incorrect.

First, the UDC never held title to the three acres. The titleholders were a Mr. and Mrs. John Brown who donated 1 acre, and a Mr. Austin B. Fletcher, who donated 2 acres. John Brown was a Confederate veteran who purchased a farm in the area after the war. He was not a veteran of Olustee or of any other battle in Florida.

Mr. Austin B. Fletcher was not only a successful lawyer on Wall Street in New York, but a native of Mendon, Massachusetts. Before earning a fortune representing banks and stock jobbers Fletcher, was a Professor of Elocution and Oratory at Brown University in Providence, RI, and a Professor of Law at Boston University.

After becoming one of the leaders of New York City's legal community Fletcher endowed the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at his alma mater, Tufts University. He also was a very prominent member of the Union League Club of New York. Fletcher's loyalty to the Union would not have been questioned during his lifetime; nor should it be questioned now.

Legal title to the three acres that now comprise the Historic battlefield park passed from the Browns and Fletcher directly to the State of Florida. It is true that the president of the Florida UDC did physically hand the real estate titles to Florida's governor at the ceremony dedicating the park—however her ceremonial participation was of no real practical or legal consequence. And it is an absolute and complete falsehood for people a century and a half later to claim that the park was once UDC property.

It has been further claimed that the site where we have proposed to erect our monument is sacred ground to Confederates. However it has always been our position that since twice as many Union soldiers died at this site, it is ground that is sacred to us as well.

With the failure of the legislative effort to kneecap Florida's park administrators and prevent them from allowing our monument we have been given a green light to proceed with our project. We have agreed to a very favorable location within the 3 acres of the state park. As the park has been awarded a substantial grant to build a new visitor's center we are awaiting receipt of a new landscape plan from the state that will incorporate our Union monument. It is estimated by state officials that the new construction and landscape renovation will take about 18 months to complete.

On September 1, 2014 we will launch a public fundraising phase of our project. This new phase will make use of new audio and visual technologies and will leverage the power of social media. We have also begun to identify descendants of Union soldiers who fought at Olustee to not only acknowledge the sacrifice of their fore parents but to give them honor long overdue. We will solicit business and corporate donations but really do want this project to be primarily funded by contributions from many individuals.

We ask that you support this project by making generous donations (no matter how large or small) to the Olustee Monument Fund kept by the Treasurer of the Department of Florida.

We also ask that you make this project known to the brothers and auxiliary organizations attached to your departments.

