



January 2021

Tri-State Card Game License Plate to Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia



This Battlefield preservation supporter, like soldiers during the War, stops to visit the Tri-State Cornerstone near State Line Cemetery in Marion County marking the junction of the Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia state lines.

The mostly 18–25-year-olds who made up the Civil War armies could hardly resist the opportunity to stand in more than one state at a time. In the late summer of 1863, the **Campaign for Chattanooga** provided that opportunity as thousands of Union soldiers travelled past and upon the convergence of the state lines of Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia, just south of the Tennessee River, near the well-known and impressive Nickajack Cave. “The corner of Tenn., Ala., and Geo. lines join here,” wrote Bliss Morse of the 105th Ohio from nearby Shellmound in a September letter to his mother, “and before I leave the place I am going to straddle them.” Other soldiers could not resist the temptation to do more than just “straddle them” --they convened a tri-state card game:

John T. Booth (Sergeant, Co. G, 36th Ohio) tells us the rest of the story, "Marking this spot of division or boundary of this trio of States is a small cornerstone, on which on their respective sides is cut the name of the State whose terminal boundary it marks. At this spot the regiment was halted. We had not been halted many minutes before a deck of cards were produced, and many of the boys, forming a quartet at a time, indulged in a game of cards around that cornerstone. One would sit in one State with his legs and feet, one of each, in another State, changing seats with each hand, thus boxing that stone, as it were, until each man had sat in each one of the three States, his limbs resting in the other two at the same time, while he vigorously chucked his cards down at the meeting of the right angular lines that marked the Tennessee boundary that separated the quadrants (on the stone's semicircular surface) of Alabama and Georgia, thus playing his cards in three States at one and the same time."



The Tri-State marker is located just south of where Major General Joseph Reynolds' 4th Division of George Thomas' 14th Corps and much of Major General Thomas Crittenden's 21st Corps crossed the Tennessee River at Shellmound – a station on the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad – in late August and early September 1863. Reynolds' men, followed by John Brannan's 3rd Division, then proceeded south up the cove beyond the marker to then climb up onto Sand Mountain.

This large troop movement through the area was part of Major General William Rosecrans' broad front, multiple column **advance on Chattanooga.**



The Tri State Corner was first marked in 1826, notably about a mile south of where it should have been - on the 35th parallel. Some of the visiting Union soldiers reportedly did some damage to the marker.

The marker there in the early 2000s was stolen in the summer of 2007 and replaced in 2011. The Alabama corner is part of a mountain resort property that erected the metal sign.

Visiting a place like the Tri-State Cornerstone and making use of soldiers' accounts remind us of the human face of our nation's costly but transformative struggle.

TCWPA thanks our members for helping us share the stories of that struggle in Tennessee.

Access to the site: The Tri-state marker site is publicly accessible via a trail from the State Line Cemetery in Marion County near Exit 161 on I-24 (Haletown/New Hope).

SEND US YOUR PHOTOS!

If you have a “Save our Battlefields” license plate, please consider stopping by and taking a photo of your plate at a battlefield or other battle-related Civil War site in your area... we’re especially interested in sites that don’t always get the historians’ spotlight! If you’re looking for a site in your area, we can help find one nearby – just email us - or if you’ve already got that special photo please send to info@tcwpa.org.



You can purchase the license plate at your County Clerk’s office for \$36.00 plus your regular registration fees. Proceeds from the sale of the plate will help protect and interpret important battlefields in Tennessee.

For more information, visit: tcwpa.org/license-plate

The Tennessee Civil War Preservation Association preserves and interprets Tennessee's Civil War Battlefields and their contributing landscapes for present and future generations.

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