

Civil War guide touts female spy

Written by

Vicki Smith
The Associated Press

Apr 23, 2011|

MORGANTOWN, W.Va.

There are battlefields, and then there's Belle Boyd, teenage temptress and Confederate spy.

The Appalachian Regional Commission is betting Boyd is the sexier Civil War story and that tourists will want to visit the Martinsburg, W.Va., home of the notorious "siren of the South" who used her feminine charms to spy on Union soldiers for the Confederacy.

The Belle Boyd House in the Eastern Panhandle is one of 150 lesser-known Civil War destinations the commission is highlighting on a new 13-state map that was released Thursday, pointing the way to that footnote on history and plenty more.

Timed to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the war, the guide is aimed at helping states cash in on the growing popularity of cultural heritage tourism and to get those tourists beyond such well-trod battlefields as Gettysburg, Pa., and Antietam, Md.

"Our story here is that there are a lot of jewels in Appalachia, and a lot of great

stories about families and communities that we should stop and take a look at," said the co-chair of the federal agency, Earl F. Gohl.

The map and guide were released at Independence Hall in Wheeling, where some Virginians were so horrified by talk of secession when the war erupted in 1861 that they held their own constitutional convention and formed the breakaway state of West Virginia two years later.

Boyd, who once boasted in a letter to a cousin of her 106-pound "beautiful" form, supplied Union secrets to Stonewall Jackson, who made her a captain and honorary aide-de-camp.

She was arrested and imprisoned twice, then released while suffering from typhoid. The Confederacy sent her to England as a courier, but she was captured before she could complete the mission. Historians say she eventually married a Union naval officer and lived in England until 1866.

Advertisement

**Protect Your Home
with ADT!**

**Click Here
to Learn More!**

ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

Boyd published a memoir and worked as an actress, then became a lecturer. She died in Wisconsin in 1900, on a tour touting her adventures.

Her story is one of many that are often missed, says Gohl. The new guide hopes to draw back the curtain on her house and other locales.

Those include Mississippi's Corinth Contraband Camp, where slaves fleeing Southern plantations sought refuge with federal troops. Union Gen. Grenville Dodge took them on as teamsters, cooks, laborers and eventually, security officers. That led to the creation of the 1st Alabama Infantry Regiment of African Descent.

Then, Gohl says, there is Altoona, Pa., where President Abraham Lincoln convened the states' governors and consulted on the Emancipation Proclamation.

The guide will be a free insert in the spring issue of American Heritage magazine, and copies have been distributed to tourism agencies in West Virginia and the 12 other Appalachian states — Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Tennessee.

Edwin Grosvenor, editor in chief of American Heritage, said the map has more information and more stories than many magazines, and those stories help make the Civil War relevant to new generations. Many schools have stopped teaching about the conflict, and over the past few decades, he said, visits to even famous

destinations such as Gettysburg have dropped some.

"People really are forgetting about the Civil War," Grosvenor said. "The sacrifices the people made — the women, the children, the elderly — they're really extraordinary ... It was so cataclysmic and affected so many people, and it's important to remember that."

Although there is enough Civil War history to fill a library, Gohl said relatively little focuses on the lives and lifestyles of noncombatants between 1861 and 1865. The commission and the states opted to focus on farms and factories, railroads and restored houses, even a sprawling cave where soldiers hid out for three years.

"There's another story here — how people lived, how culture developed," Gohl said.

Kentucky's Mountain Life Museum in London features seven pioneer settlement buildings filled with relics from that agricultural era.

Advertisement

**Protect Your Home
with ADT!**

**Click Here
to Learn More!**

ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

At the Gordon-Roberts House in Cumberland, Md., visitors can learn from Priscilla McKaig's journals about her son's enlistment in the Confederate army.

In Ripley, Ohio, tourists can see where ardent anti-slavery activist John Rankin — a Presbyterian minister — sheltered 2,000 slaves escaping to freedom via the Underground Railroad.

And in South Carolina, they can learn how James Clement Furman opened his Greenville college to women when the men went off to war. They paid their tuition with bacon, sugar and lard.

This is the third tourism map the ARC has created, with others focused on thematic driving tours.

Surveys done after those projects suggest the value of a relatively small investment in the latest map — \$9,000 to develop and 12 cents apiece to print. After the previous projects, Gohl said, surveyed destinations reported a 15 percent to 50 percent jump in visitation.

"This is an approach that works," he said.

The U.S. Travel Association estimates tourism is a \$704 billion industry, and the cultural heritage sector is growing at twice the rate of the overall market. Appalachia is home to six of the 10 most-visited states in that sector.

Although West Virginia's Civil War offerings are relatively well known and within a day's drive of much of the East Coast, Tourism

Commissioner Betty Carver said most people still visit for outdoor recreation. But now the outdoor adventurers themselves are looking for historic sites and other attractions to complement the thrill of rock climbing and rafting.

The new map, Carver said, "raises the profile of West Virginia by putting our sites right there alongside the other states." It also supports places the states are already marketing, like the 10-room Belle Boyd house, already part of West Virginia's Washington Heritage Trail. Inside, visitors will find tea pots, cookie jars and tales of Belle Boyd's intrigue.

Advertisement

**Protect Your Home
with ADT!**

ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER

**Click Here
to Learn More!**

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



Zoom

Advertisement

**Protect Your Home
with ADT!**



***Click Here
to Learn More!***

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™