

# 'Peace treaty' signed to end Coal Creek War

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By Bob Fowler

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Barry Thacker, president of Coal Creek Watershed Foundation, explains the history of the Coal Creek War during a ceremony Friday at the site of Fort Anderson on Militia Hill. (BOB FOWLER/NEWS SENTINEL)



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Members of the Coal Creek Marching Band, composed of fourth- and fifth-graders at

LAKE CITY — The hostilities, at long last, are over.

A peace treaty formally ending the infamous Coal Creek War of 1892 was signed Friday on tree-shrouded Militia Hill, a knoll of remote Vowell Mountain overlooking Lake City.

The ceremony also recognized the site as the location of Fort Anderson, where Tennessee National Guardsmen

Briceville Elementary, hold their homemade musical instruments as they prepare for their performance Friday celebrating the addition of Fort Anderson on Militia Hill to the National Register of Historic Places. (BOB FOWLER/NEWS SENTINEL)

fought a pitched battle with striking coal miners upset that the state had brought in convicts to work in their mines.

Trenches dug by guardsmen as battlements and protections from attacking coal miners are the only visible remnants of the fort.

The location, featuring nine markers describing that bloody chapter of Anderson County's past, has been named to the National Register of Historic Places, said Barry Thacker, president of Coal Creek Watershed Foundation.

The nonprofit organization for 13 years has been working to improve the environment, living conditions and the education of residents of the isolated mountainous area, pockmarked by abandoned coal mines.

And Friday's ceremony was another bid to acquaint students of tiny Briceville School with their area's colorful past.

Thacker said the Coal Creek War was never officially ended, prompting Friday's event.

"This is a really great way to involve young people in history," said state Sen. Randy McNally, R-Oak Ridge. "We don't spend enough time learning it and teaching it to young people."

McNally, like other participants, wore a green bandana knotted around his neck in recognition of the occasion.

Striking miners wore such bandannas as a way to identify fellow members of their ragtag insurrection.

Fourth- and fifth-graders at the school, serving as the Coal Creek Marching Band, launched ceremonies, playing homemade instruments fashioned from kazoos, PVC pipes and funnels duct-taped together, to the tune of "Stars and Stripes Forever."

"This is wonderful, something that should have been done years ago," said Vowell Mountain resident Martha O'Shell-Bridges, wife, daughter and granddaughter of coal miners whose family tree dates to the sturdy Welsh immigrants who came to America to work the mines. "I walked these trenches before these signs were ever erected," she said.

"It's really helped the kids to know what went on here," said lifelong resident Savannah Eagleton.

"On behalf of the governor, we're going to officially declare an end to these hostilities," said state Rep. John Ragan, R-Oak Ridge.

During the Coal Creek War, 27 miners were killed and more than 500 were arrested.

The uprising prodded the General Assembly to end the practice of leasing out convicts to work in coal mines.

# Knoxville Photos



PHOTO BY BOB FOWLER

Members of the Coal Creek Marching Band, composed of fourth- and fifth-graders at Briceville Elementary, hold their homemade musical instruments as they prepare for their performance Friday celebrating the addition of Fort Anderson on Militia Hill to the National Register of Historic Places. (BOB FOWLER/NEWS SENTINEL)