

Civil War News Roundup - 08/22/2008
Courtesy of the Civil War Preservation Trust
www.civilwar.org

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Groups want to sidetrack Orange project

By CLINT SCHEMMER

08/22/2008

Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star (VA)

http://fredericksburg.com/News/FLS/2008/082008/08222008/404923/index_html?page=2

Preservation groups have fired the opening salvo of a battle over development proposed in the Wilderness battlefield area.

The newly formed Wilderness Battlefield Coalition has informed Wal-Mart that it opposes its plan to build a 142,000-square-foot Supercenter near State Routes 3 and 20. On Wednesday, the trust e-mailed a "Take Action!" bulletin to its 20,000-plus activists and friends, urging them to write Wal-Mart President and CEO H. Lee Scott Jr. and express their views.

"This is just the wrong project at the wrong place at the wrong time," Civil War Preservation Trust spokesman Jim Campi said yesterday. "This kind of commercial development is absolutely incompatible with a battlefield park.

"Our principal concern is that this will create a mushroom effect and development is going to explode in that very sensitive Route 3 and Route 20 region, if this is allowed to proceed."

The nonprofit trust, headquartered in Washington, has joined forces with the Piedmont Environmental Council, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Parks Conservation Association, the Friends of the Wilderness Battlefield, and the Friends of the Fredericksburg Area Battlefields to create the coalition.

Wal-Mart proposes to build a 141,487-square-foot store on about 15 acres of a 50-acre tract just north of Route 3, according to local officials. The parcel extends from Wilderness Run at the Spotsylvania County line toward Vacluse Road, wrapping around a 7-Eleven, a Wachovia Bank branch and the Wilderness Center strip mall.

Another group has proposed a 1.65 million-square-foot retail, office and government complex, named Wilderness Crossing, on 846 acres adjacent to the planned Wal-Mart site.

Wal-Mart spokeswoman Kelly Hobbs confirmed yesterday afternoon that the world's largest company intends to build on the smaller site in concert with developer JDC Ventures of Vienna.

"Wal-Mart is continuing our due diligence, and hopes to submit an application to the county within the next few weeks," Hobbs said. "We've been working with county staff for some months on design criteria in hopes our project will be consistent with the look and feel of Orange County."

The tract is within a quarter mile of Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park. It's on ground where some of the Battle of the Wilderness was fought on May 5-6, 1864, but is not within the boundary Congress authorized for the park.

Park Superintendent Russ Smith said the issue is not one of the store's design, but of land use. "It's not appropriate to put a massive development like that right next to a national park," Smith said he told Wal-Mart officials and its attorney in a meeting earlier this summer about the project.

"We would hope that Wal-Mart will consider other locations, both on aesthetic grounds, because of the way a Wal-Mart would change the character of the area, and because of the traffic that would be generated."

JDC's site plan calls for a Wal-Mart Supercenter and four other pad sites large enough for "junior big boxes," Smith said. Such a cluster of large stores could completely alter the setting of the Wilderness battlefield, he said.

The battlefield, only part of which is protected by the Park Service, draws some 170,000 visitors annually and is the largest tourism destination in Orange County.

Hobbs dodged a question as to whether the Arkansas-based retailer would consider sites other than the JDC Ventures property. Under the county's recently adopted big-box ordinance, the developer must obtain a special-use permit.

As to the concerns expressed by the Wilderness Battlefield Coalition, Hobbs noted the property has been zoned for commercial development for more than 20 years and is in the Route 3 "growth corridor" that Orange has designated for economic development.

"We certainly respect their mission to preserve the battlefield, but feel our project--in a commercially zoned area--will be the best fit possible for the local economy, while keeping the historical interests in mind," she said of the coalition.

Hobbs said Wal-Mart officials look forward to meeting with Park Service officials, as well as coalition leaders and area residents, as soon as its plans for its store are complete.

History snapshot

The Battle of the Wilderness, one of the Civil War's largest and most important conflicts, was the first clash between Gens. Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant. The battle began Grant's grueling Overland Campaign, which drained both armies and eventually brought Union troops to the gates of Richmond.

More than 160,000 men fought in the two-day struggle along the Orange Turnpike (modern State Route 20) and the Orange Plank Road. Nearly 29,000 Americans were killed, wounded or captured in the fighting at The Wilderness.

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Kaine OKs Fort Monroe Reuse Plan
By Matthew Sturdevant

8/20/2008

Newport News Daily Press (VA)

http://www.dailypress.com/news/local/hampton/dp-local_monroe_0820aug20,0,4117649,print.story

Gov. Timothy M. Kaine on Tuesday approved a broad reuse plan that will allow Fort Monroe to become a combination tourist destination, park, and community of homes, offices and retail businesses.

An 18-member Fort Monroe Federal Area Development Authority has worked with consultants on the delicate act of preserving the post, which is a nationally registered landmark, while coming up with a plan to have it bring in enough revenue to pay for maintenance, restoration and improvements. The authority approved the plan in June and it was submitted to the governor for final approval.

"I am pleased with the work of the FMFADA over the past 18 months to create a plan for Fort Monroe that ensures this spectacular and historic property will be enjoyed by many generations to come," Kaine said in a prepared statement. "I also am pleased that the process to create the reuse plan has included many community and regional leaders, experts in historic preservation and economic development, the city of Hampton, and the National Park Service."

Kaine will sign the reuse plan at 9 a.m. today at the Chamberlin Hotel on the historic military installation and he will tour the post. The event is open to the public.

The reuse plan divides the post into management zones. Each zone has a recommended way the land could be used: as open space for a park, in a way that adapts existing buildings for some nonmilitary use, or as a site for new development. The authority will market the property with the goal of getting contracts and leases so the post remains a financially sustainable community, said authority Executive Director William A. Armbruster. Only during the contracting and leasing phase will it be clear what the future of each particular building or lot.

The 570-acre fort is revered as a coastal defense site dating back to Colonial times, as a beacon of freedom to slaves who fled there to be deemed contraband of the Civil War, and as an artillery training base from 1824 through World War II.

In 2005, the Pentagon announced that Fort Monroe would be closed as part of a military realignment to cut costs and modernize the military. The Army is expected to move out in September 2011 and the land will revert to the commonwealth.

The transition has piqued interest from people who see it for its historic importance and as a great location to live, work or play, a waterfront settlement of brick buildings, well-manicured lawns and a giant moated fortress.

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Group Protects Civil War Enclave

By Hayes Hickman

8/18/2008

Knoxville News Sentinel (TN)

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2008/aug/18/group-protects-historic-enclave/>

Its Civil War significance aside, the South Knoxville site that was once Fort Higley can still surprise newcomers with its lush urban woodlands, tucked away barely a mile from downtown in an enclave that could just as easily be mistaken for a quiet corner of the Great Smoky Mountains.

And the Aslan Foundation wants to ensure it will stay that way.

The local philanthropy of the late attorney Lindsay Young purchased nearly 100 acres - encompassing the majority of the former Union Army encampment - for more than \$2.3 million last month, recognizing its value as a historic and aesthetic community asset worth protecting from encroaching development.

Until then, the property was in line to become one of the next likely parcels to be graded and cleared by a Georgia developer for more of the same condominiums that crowd an adjacent ridgetop along Cherokee Trail, where a more recently added sky-blue water tower now marks the spot.

"It's spectacular topography," said Robert Young Jr., chairman of Aslan's six-member board of directors. "And it's only when it's threatened that you pause and say, 'Oh my God, we can't lose this property.' For it to be diced up and laid bare ... it's not in the long-term interest of the city. At a certain point, you realize you're losing too much."

The purchase represents a break from the foundation's normal focus on education and child- and animal-welfare causes, and Aslan's board members admit that the initiative came about through "pure happenstance."

As board member Lindsay McDonough explains it, the idea began last year when she and her husband attended a friend's birthday party in the little-known Log Haven community, a cluster of log cabins and cottages dating to the 1930s, nestled in the same steep folds defended by Fort Higley's troops nearly 150 years ago. McDonough said she had never known what lay just south of Cherokee Trail before. Yet, as impressed as she was with the serene getaway, so too was she shocked by the density of off-campus condos that had taken hold nearby, poised to storm Fort Higley's flanks again, like the Confederates of 1863 at the nearby Battle of Armstrong Hill.

"We just saw a need," McDonough said. "We're building a great deal over there without knowing what's to come."

The foundation saw its chance to go on the offensive, as it were, when the national housing market fell into decline and Atlanta-based developer David White, who bought the property in 2005, decided to put it back on the market. White could not be reached for comment last week.

"I think that gave us our chance," Young said. Otherwise, "I think Fort Higley would be covered with bulldozers right now."

The little-publicized Aslan acquisition has brought new hope to several groups sympathetic to the land, notably local Civil War historians who had lost their fight against the developer's rezoning requests for higher-density construction at Knoxville City Council and Knox County Commission.

"Out of the blue ... the Aslan Foundation made an amazing contribution to Knoxville's heritage," said Joan Markel, an archaeologist with the University of Tennessee's McClung Museum and current president of the local Civil War Roundtable.

Because the property sat in private hands for decades, no proper archaeological survey has ever been conducted in the area, she said. Amateur archaeologists, working on the sly, had been able only to comb the dirt turned during the construction of the initial phase of the nearby Woodlands of Knoxville development, Markel explained. Nevertheless, their efforts discovered ammunition, mini balls, a sword, buckles and, reportedly, a few trace human remains in the vicinity of the Armstrong Hill battle.

"We really don't know what's (still) up there," she said, adding that she hopes would-be scavenger hunters will let the land be for now. "We know soldiers lived south of the river, but those things have never been scientifically explored."

Only faint impressions of the earthen fort that once crowned the ridge can be found today by trained eyes - former rifle trenches that still scar the hillside and the footprint of at least one large gun emplacement.

The outpost was one link in a ring of as many as 16 Union forts and batteries that once encircled Knoxville, which served as a strategic supply and transportation hub during the War Between the States.

The close-knit Log Haven community, too, is praising Aslan members for their foresight. Most of them renters, the residents joined other interests in protesting the rezoning but never mustered the clout to counter development plans.

"It's a miracle," said Andrew Gunnoe, a UT graduate student who has lived in the secluded retreat for six years. "We'd thought of everything in the world to try and save this place. This one just kind of popped up. I don't know what else to say - God bless nonprofits. We need more of them."

The foundation's benevolence also is being called an early success for a joint city-county ridgetop protection task force, spurred into being early this year after construction on the water tower took many locals by surprise.

"It's been handed to us," said Knox County Commissioner Tony Norman, who co-chairs the group with South Knoxville City Councilman Joe Hultquist.

Among other opportunities, Hultquist added, the site might offer Knoxville a foothold in the growing market of historic tourism, as well as a tangible link toward better understanding the community's heritage.

"We tend to forget who we are and look for short-term gains," he said. "We have an opportunity to say, 'This is who we are.' "

For now, though, Young emphasized that the preservation effort still is in its earliest stages. The Aslan board expects to hold the property until its ultimate use, as well as a suitable long-term caretaker, can be decided.

"Who's going to own it? I have no idea," Young said. "Our idea is to pause the process of development for a year or two. ... We want to consider everybody's best ideas for this and the needs of the city."

The foundation, which did not consult anyone prior to the purchase, now is in talks with several parties, including historians, preservationists and groups such as the Legacy Parks Foundation.

Young said the "spectacularly beautiful" landscape holds potential as a public park, a privately maintained woodland for public use - much like Ijams Nature Center - or even an environmental studies campus.

"We were interested in projects that no one else would take, that no one else would risk," he said. "This feels exactly right."

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Witness Trees Provide Last Living Link to Battle
By Erin James

8/17/2008

Hanover Evening Sun (PA)

http://www.eveningsun.com/ci_10230278

They are the last living link to the America's bloodiest battle.

Union and Confederate soldiers who fought at Gettysburg have long since passed. So, too, have the residents who sought shelter in basement cellars while musket and cannon fire engulfed their town.

But a handful of trees that were there then still stand tall today on the Gettysburg Battlefield. They are the silent survivors of the July 1 through 3, 1863, battle that historians say was the turning point of the Civil War. Officials at the Gettysburg National Military Park call them the "witness trees."

There is no official number on how many remain because no one knows for sure. Only parts of the battlefield have been surveyed by experts who can identify

145-year-old trees. And photographic evidence solidifies the history of only a few. Yet the public's interest in the trees' unique brand of living history has not waned.

The storm that damaged a famous honey locust tree in the National Cemetery last week garnered national attention and inquiries as to what would happen to wood from the branches knocked to the ground by wind.

"It's always amazing how passionate people are about witness trees at Gettysburg," said Park Service spokeswoman Katie Lawhon.

In an Associated Press article about the storm damage, park historian John Heiser was quoted as saying only four witness trees - including the honey locust on Cemetery Hill - remain in the heart of the battlefield.

But Heiser, unavailable for further comment this week, was most likely referencing the most-famous trees, the ones easily identified by members of the public, Lawhon said.

In fact, there are likely dozens of trees left on the 6,000-acre field from the time of the battle, she said.

Seven have long been documented as witness trees, and Lawhon said about a dozen more have been identified over the years through the park's rehabilitation program to restore the field to a landscape more closely resembling what it looked like in 1863. Witness trees are preserved when they are identified through the project.

But only parts of the battlefield have been studied that closely. "There are so many wooded areas on the battlefield," Lawhon said. "There's definitely more out there."

The seven

A sapling at the time of the battle, a huge white oak tree now stands alone on a hill overlooking Devil's Den - the site of Smith's Battery, which held the Confederates off Houck's Ridge until it was literally overrun.

The tree was spared during the park's recent cuttings of non-historic trees. But judging by the deliberate building of an avenue around its roots, its significance has long been known. The Devil's Den oak is one of the seven Lawhon said are the most famous, most well-documented witness trees of Gettysburg.

Another three stand on Culp's Hill, where the two opposing armies traded gunfire for two days. Here the Confederates attacked the hill held by Union forces, but the Rebs were never able to dislodge the Union troops of Greene's brigade and their reinforcements. The hill was a more popular tourist spot soon after the battle because of the shot-up trees and log wall - long since deteriorated - used as protection by Union forces.

Just inside the tree line off the Culp's Hill tour road near the monument to the 78th and 102nd New York regiments, the first, a giant white oak, dominates the woods. A makeshift wooden sign identifies it as the "God Tree," and several American and Confederate flags sit at its base.

The tree's unusual shape is tough to miss. It's believed a shell was shot through the trunk during the fighting, causing it to grow almost as two individual trees. Efforts to save the tree are still visible by the concrete someone used to fill the wound.

The other two witness trees on Culp's Hill stand practically side by side, separated only by a boulder. A photograph taken by Matthew Brady 12 days after the battle shows the two trees, much smaller in 1863.

A fifth witness tree hides in plain sight off Hancock Avenue, the road that takes tourists through a line of monuments commemorating Pickett's Charge and the Union's victory there. Its smaller size is deceiving, but the Gibbon Tree is likely the last witness tree in the center of the battlefield.

The black walnut is named for Union Gen. John Gibbon, the divisional commander whose units bore the brunt of Pickett's Charge. Gibbon was wounded in the vicinity of the tree and is supposed to have rested under it. The tree's roots run under the road, stunting its growth and numbering its days.

Across from Abraham Trostle's farm, a sixth tree with a massive circumference marks the scene of brutal fighting between advancing Confederates and the 9th Massachusetts artillery battery.

But the swamp white oak is most associated with Union Gen. Daniel Sickles, whose headquarters was located in the nearby house.

The seventh is the honey locust damaged in last week's storm. It stands just 150 feet from the platform on which President Abraham Lincoln delivered his most-famous speech. The only witness tree in the cemetery, battlefield guides often point it out to visitors.

And though it was severely damaged in the storm, park officials say it wasn't destroyed. The trunk and several living branches remain. Lawhon said honey locust is a species that tends to sprout new growth, so officials are optimistic.

"We are hoping that the tree will recover," she said. "It's not pretty, but it's alive."

None of the seven trees are officially marked to inform battlefield visitors of their witness-tree status. Park officials reserve that honor for battle-related significance, Lawhon said.

"I think we do have to recognize that while Gettysburg does have these beautiful old trees, the monumentation on the battlefield is definitely more directed toward the fighting of the battle," she said.

More out there

The seven witness trees on Gettysburg's battlefield represent just a portion of the likely total. That's because only in recent years have more been identified through the park's rehabilitation project. Officials say about a dozen more have been given witness-tree status since the project began. And Lawhon said she expects they'll find more.

But no complete studies have been done on the topic, and no official documentation exists, Lawhon said.

"There are probably even more in areas where we haven't done studies," she said. "We haven't created a complete listing or map of these trees."

Randy Krichten, the park's biological science technician, said only a handful of trees have gone through the proper testing to determine their age, and he too expects more are scattered throughout the battlefield.

"There a lot of other trees throughout the woods that would potentially be witness trees," he said.

During the rehabilitation project, researchers sometimes had to make an educated guess when deciding what should be removed and what should remain.

They tend to err on the side of caution, leaving trees that may or may not be from the time of the battle. That happened in parts of the Codori-Trostle thicket, where there remain some confirmed witness trees and others surveyors aren't sure about, Krichten said.

"There's a handful in there," he said. "Personally, I don't think that all the trees that were left in the Codori thicket are historic trees."

Determining the exact age of a tree is not as simple as counting rings, Krichten said. It requires researchers to "core" the tree and then send the sample off to a lab to be analyzed, he said.

"It's pretty time-consuming to take a core and then to properly read it," Krichten said.

Lawhon said it's possible the Gettysburg National Military Park could document witness trees someday, but it's an undertaking that requires time and money the park doesn't have now.

As for how long the remaining witness trees could live on, Krichten said it depends on a number of factors. The species of the tree is one thing, but natural elements are more likely to destroy older trees. The longer a tree has been around, the more vulnerable it is to wind and ice, he said.

"They can't tolerate extremes as well," Krichen said. "That could be a factor that could kill them pretty fast."

'Couldn't get your arms around it'

Gettysburg's witness trees are not limited to only those located within the park's 6,000-acre boundary. In downtown Gettysburg, a sycamore tree towers over Alumni Park just off the sidewalk along Baltimore Street.

Unlike the park trees, this one is marked by a plaque which reads: "President Lincoln passed by this tree on November 19, 1863." The plaque was dedicated by the Civil War Preservation Trust in 1978.

Though it is not within the park's congressionally designated boundary, the Baltimore Street tree likely saw fighting. Nearby Winebrenner's Run was the edge of the Confederate skirmish line, and men fought there at the old Wagon Hotel, where a convenience store now sits.

Others could remain in the borough from the time of the battle, but there's no complete list of those either.

Some locals are wondering if, in the same storm that damaged the honey locust, another witness tree was taken down.

Borough Manager John Lawver said crews had to remove a large tree near the borough office on High Street after winds knocked it over.

"There's a lot of word on the street that it was a witness tree because of the size of it," he said. "I mean, you couldn't get your arms around it."

Saving the honey locust

Lawhon said the Park Service turned the wood from the downed branches over to the Gettysburg Foundation, a nonprofit organization that partners with the park on various preservation projects.

Lawhon said she didn't believe any decision had been made yet on what to do with the wood, but it would likely be used to raise funds for preservation money, she said.

Gettysburg Foundation spokeswoman Dru Neil did not immediately return calls seeking comment.

One local businessman said he was intrigued by the reports of the damaged honey locust and has been trying to pinpoint an answer on what will happen to the wood.

Gettysburg Signs owner Gene Golden said he would also like to see it used for fundraising.

It's an idea he said was inspired by the Wye Oak in Maryland. That tree survived for an estimated 460 years in the village of Wye Mills in Talbot County and became the living symbol of the state tree, the white oak.

When it succumbed to a severe thunderstorm in 2002, the wood was made available to artists. That's what Golden said he'd like to see happen with the branches from the National Cemetery's honey locust. "It's worth the effort to save the wood and preserve it," he said.

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The History Will Linger At Remade Ford's Theatre

By Michael E. Ruane

08/15/2008

Washington Post (DC)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/14/AR2008081403328.html?hpid=moreheadlines>

Inside Ford's Theatre, there is nothing original: no hint of the fire that ruined the place in 1862, no trace of the actual box where Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, no vestige of the forgotten catastrophe almost three decades later that killed 22 people and injured 60 others.

What's inside now dates from a 1960s renovation, theater officials say, and much of that is being transformed. The "cursed" old theater on 10th Street NW, twice wrecked by disaster and once marked by assassination, is partway through its first major renovation in 40 years.

This week, Paul R. Tetreault, the theater's producing director, provided a glimpse at the project, about two-thirds completed. The goal is to remake Ford's into the centerpiece of a state-of-the-art Lincoln campus in honor of the bicentennial of the president's birth Feb. 12.

The theater, which has been closed since last August, is now a dusty tangle of construction equipment and shiny ductwork. The box where Lincoln was shot, a 1960s reconstruction of the original, is barely visible through a forest of floor-to-ceiling scaffolding. The theater's seats are gone, and the stage is bare.

But by early next year, Ford's will have a new entrance next door, new seats, new stage equipment, new restrooms, a new air-conditioning system, elevators (for the first time), a new museum and a new lobby featuring a haunting display under glass of the blood-spotted overcoat Lincoln was wearing the night he was killed.

The new entrance, with a weather canopy and a vertical marquee reading "Ford's Theatre," will be in the Atlantic Building just north of the old theater. The old theater entrance will become the exit.

The entrance will lead to a lobby, a gift shop, box offices, concessions and the cylindrical case containing the coat, which was embroidered on the inside with the words, "One Country One Destiny."

"That will be here, showcased in this main lobby," Tetreault said. "You'll be able to see [the coat] from the outside, in the evening. You'll be able to see it when the theater's closed, 24-7. It'll be a really signature element."

The theater, owned by the federal government and managed by the National Park Service, typically draws almost a million visitors a year, including many who come to see plays. When it reopens in February, it will do so with a specially commissioned play about Lincoln's life titled "The Heavens Are Hung in Black."

The theater will hold 650 people, down from the previous capacity of 682 but with fewer obstructed-view seats. A new Lincoln education center is also planned for a building across the street. That is scheduled to open in 2010.

"Abraham Lincoln became Abraham Lincoln when he lived in Washington," Tetreault said. "That's when he became the man that we all know. Prior to that, he was a prairie lawyer and a one-term congressman."

Lincoln was shot by actor John Wilkes Booth on Good Friday, April 14, 1865, and died at 7:22 the next morning in a boarding house across the street from the theater.

Ford's Theatre was a Baptist church until it was taken over in 1861 by entrepreneur John T. Ford. The venue was destroyed by fire the night of Dec. 30, 1862, but was rebuilt and reopened in 1863.

After the assassination, Tetreault said, the theater became a gigantic crime scene, and when Ford sought to reopen for business, there was a public outcry. "It is holy ground," a newspaper at the time proclaimed, "and must not be profaned."

The government bought the theater from Ford and used it over the years as a museum and as an office and storage building.

On the morning of June 9, 1893, the building was packed with 500 government clerks, occupying several floors of jury-rigged office space, when the interior collapsed, according to a Washington Post account the next day. Scores were killed and injured, and the theater's already altered interior was destroyed.

"People thought at that time, 'This is just a cursed building,' " Tetreault said.

The government rebuilt it again -- and again used the building for storage. In the 1950s, the government decided to restore the building as a historic site and theater venue, and Ford's reopened in 1968.

Some of the exterior walls remain from the 1860s, but what is inside is all a reconstruction.

"Nothing in this space is original," Tetreault said as he stood amid the scaffolding Wednesday afternoon. Not the presidential box, not the ceiling, not the stage. "Nothing."

"Now, it was painstakingly restored," he said, based in part on what were essentially crime scene photographs of the interior taken by famed Civil War photographer Mathew Brady.

"Though it is not original," Tetreault said, "there are probably 90 percent of the people that come in this theater that believe that what they're looking at is the exact theater that Abraham Lincoln was shot in, not a replica."

But even a replica can grow haggard over 40 years, Tetreault said, and officials realized that Ford's badly needed to be updated.

Last year, the theater embarked on what has become a \$50 million restoration project. The federal government provided \$8.9 million, and the theater is raising the rest. So far, it has raised \$32 million.

The D.C. government has allocated \$10 million in its next budget to help with the project and various programs there.

"We have a hard date here," Tetreault said. "It is the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln in February of 2009, and this theater will be open for that."

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Ellwood named favorite Virginia Civil War site
By Allison Brophy Champion

08/15/2008

Culpeper Star Exponent (VA)

http://www.starexponent.com/cse/news...ar_site/19810/

Ellwood, that old red farmhouse on the Wilderness Battlefield of Orange County, is really getting noticed.

The readers of Rappahannock Electric Cooperative's "Cooperative Living" recently selected the 1790s structure "Favorite Virginia Civil War Site." Ellwood was named as such in this month's edition of the magazine, which is distributed to more than 350,000 REC power customers in Virginia, Maryland and Delaware.

The "Reader's Choice" recognition of Ellwood means increased exposure for a historic house now in the throes of a massive rehab.

"It helps bring Ellwood out of the shadows," said Russ Smith, superintendent of the Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park, of which the two-story frame house is part.

"I hope that it sparks curiosity so that more regional visitors will come to see what Ellwood is all about."

It is perhaps best known for what's buried not far from its front door: the amputated arm of Confederate General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson. Jackson lost the arm in the May 1863 Battle of Chancellorsville, shot by his own troops.

Surgeons amputated his arm at the nearby Wilderness Tavern Field Hospital and Jackson's limb was buried with a marked stone in the Ellwood family cemetery. (He died eight days later — the rest of his body is buried in Lexington.)

William Jones built Ellwood near the end of the 1700s and it has stood firm since, witness to more than 200 years of United States history.

Confederate and Union soldiers bled and died inside Ellwood, a makeshift Civil War hospital during the Chancellorsville Battle and the Marquis de Lafayette stopped there for breakfast in 1825.

In addition, Union General Gouverneur K. Warren moved into Ellwood, setting up his headquarters in the front room during the May 1864 Battle of the Wilderness.

The Friends of Wilderness Battlefield, a volunteer group dedicated to fully restoring, maintaining and interpreting Ellwood, recently completed phase one of the house rehab — a five-month project that included restoration of the Warren room and two others.

FOWB has been raising money for the renovation for five years, said project chairwoman Carolyn Elstner, whose grandparents lived at Ellwood until 1977 when it was turned over to the National Park Service.

“Oh, my gosh I just keep pinching myself,” she said of the phase one end result. “It is exactly what the park said it would be and what we have been able to allow them to do by our fundraising and keeping it open to the public.”

Being recognized by Cooperative Living is a cherry on that sundae.

“Ellwood deserved it,” Elstner said, “and I think it will bring even more attention to the site.”

In fact, when she stopped by the house last weekend two visitors mentioned the Cooperative Living article in a half hour’s time.

Elstner of Fredericksburg thanked the readers who voted for Ellwood and encouraged those who haven’t checked the place out to do so.

Phase two of the home’s renovation starts next month — an estimated \$75,000 project, she said. The NPS will oversee design of interpretative exhibits on the first floor.

It is certainly a worthy project, Smith noted, because that old farmhouse stands alone.

“Aside from being an excellent example of an 18th century Orange County plantation house, Elwood is the only surviving structure from the Battle of the Wilderness,” he said. “Our vision is for Elwood to be the gateway to the Wilderness Battlefield.”

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Lohn Teacher Attends National Civil War Institute
By Neal Ulmer

8/6/2008

Brady Standard-Herald (TX)

http://www.heartotexasnews.com/bradyherald/features_story.asp?story_no=3

Having the chance to visit some of the most storied battlefields of the Civil War and participate in workshops designed to help teachers interpret the war to their students was the opportunity of a lifetime for Lohn history teacher Tedra Ulmer.

Ulmer, who has taught at Lohn for the past three years, attended the Civil War Preservation Trust's annual Teacher Institute July 26-28 in Hagerstown, Md., along with approximately 100 other teachers from around the United States.

"This was a childhood dream come true," said Ulmer, who talked her mother into buying her first book about the Civil War when she was only six. "To actually walk the battlefields of Gettysburg, Harpers' Ferry and Antietam, and to hear some of the top experts in this field debate questions about the war was just awesome."

She added, "I truly enjoyed visiting with the other teachers and the speakers. We had people there from as far away as Alaska and California, Florida and Michigan, so I was able to learn a great deal about the school systems in those states and the challenges other teachers face, as well as new ideas to use in my classroom."

The speakers included a panel of authors, including a professor from Virginia Tech. Virginia Tech provided the Continuing Education Units for the teachers.

The Civil War Preservation Trust is an organization which matches public and private funds to preserve vanishing battlefields, "hallowed grounds," across the United States. For example, the latest effort involves securing lands around Fort Morris, South Carolina to prevent development of the ground made famous in the film "Glory," which focuses on the 54th Massachusetts U.S. Infantry, an African-American regiment. For every \$10 raised to save this particular land, \$30 in matching funds has gathered from private donors and public funds.

"Only when you travel back East and see how development is taking over these battlefields do you realize how important these efforts are," said Ulmer. "In the town of Winchester, Va., which was the site of four major battles, development has almost totally covered the area. It's difficult to visualize what happened from a historical marker in a bank parking lot!"

She noted some of the land in Virginia currently being sought for preservation is valued at over \$30,000 per acre. "I appreciate the work the Trust does because they enable landowners to get top dollar for their property, yet still preserve the land for public access" Ulmer said.

She noted projects have been carried out in conjunction with the National Park Service, state and local governments to preserve historic sites in locations as far-flung as Virginia, New Mexico and California.

The Trust has defined teacher education as a key means to reach the public with its mission. Ulmer noted there are special activities to involve classes in areas with battlefields. The institute, however, featured many workshops which provided information useful to teachers in places such as Brady.

“One of my favorite workshops was on the use of current technology to bring period pictures to life for the students. I also enjoyed workshops on using primary sources to engage students, as well as the Lincoln Murder Mystery session, which involved role playing. I felt all the workshops would apply easily to other time periods and help my students master technology, as well as basic skills like reading and writing.”

She said she strongly recommends the Institute to teachers, and hopes to return next year. For teachers and others who don't have that opportunity, she suggests visiting the organization's website, www.civilwar.org.

“It has curriculum ideas, beautiful photos and wonderful information about the mission of the CWPT,” she noted.

This year's Institute focus was on the Battle of Antietam, fought in Sept. 1862 near Sharpsburg, Md., and Harper's Ferry, which was brought to national prominence by John Brown in his infamous raid of October 1859. Ulmer also attended the tour of Harper's Ferry and participated in three hands-on workshops conducted by National Park Service personnel, as well as tours of two sites above the town itself which had been purchased and restored by the CWPT.

“One of the things the CWPT does is to purchase the land, then add exhibits. At the Bolivar Heights area overlooking Harpers' Ferry, they cleared brush and trees, enabling visitors to stand at the Federal position and see how General Stonewall Jackson's lines were placed to eventually surround them and force a surrender.”

One of the advantages of being at these locations, Ulmer noted, was an appreciation of their importance throughout U.S. history. Merriwether Lewis visited Harper's Ferry and the Federal Arsenal before his epic expedition exploring the Louisiana Purchase to obtain guns, ammunition, and an iron-framed, folding boat. Thomas Jefferson once wrote that the view from the upper town of Harper's Ferry was one of the most spectacular in the entire country.

In addition to visiting the Gettysburg battlefield and other Civil War sites such as Jackson's headquarters in Winchester, “We managed to travel part of the Blue Ridge Skyline Highway, visit the campuses of Washington and Lee University and Virginia Military Institute, Baltimore and Fort McHenry,” said Ulmer.

What were her most memorable experiences? “Being on the Gettysburg Battlefield late in the evening at Devil's Den, where the Texans under General Hood attacked on July 2, 1863, and also standing in the “Bloody Lane” at Antietam were incredibly moving,” she said.

“I immediately realized the war would have been incredibly short if I had been in charge—I can't even imagine walking in the July heat and humidity carrying a 12-pound musket and wearing a wool uniform and wooden-soled shoes—or no shoes at all, if I were one of the Confederates. When you realize troops sometimes marched 30 or 40 miles in one day, little food or water, then straight into battle, it's amazing. The bravery of those soldiers to walk right into the face of artillery and musket fire was astounding.”

What if you don't know much about the Civil War but still would like to tour the battlefield? Extensive markers with explanations and often maps or pictures to interpret the battles are everywhere on battlefields like Gettysburg and Antietam. You can also purchase CD Audio Tours to take in your vehicle, which include pictures, battle maps and additional information.

"Or, as we did," said Ulmer, "you can hire a licensed battlefield guide who actually drives you around in your car and explains everything in as much detail as you wish." Ulmer noted the guides tailor their explanations to their audience, "So for a Civil War buff they go into a lot of detail and discuss issues the ordinary person would not be interested in — but they also patiently answer the same basic questions over and over!"

One of the high points was visiting General Stonewall Jackson's headquarters in Winchester and touching the desk he used, as well as seeing his prayer book and the actual flag of his original regiment, the 33rd Virginia Infantry—eventually known as the "Stonewall Brigade." An evening trip to the cemetery where Jackson was buried in Lexington, Va., was a favorite.

"People still leave small Confederate flags and lemons at his grave," Ulmer said, noting the general became fond of lemons during the Mexican War and even munched on them during battles.

"Probably the most wonderful experience was being with over a hundred other people at the Institute who enjoy being at these sites and discussing the Civil War. It's nice to talk about these topics and not have people stare at you like you've gone insane." Ulmer added, "I found I'm not the only person obsessed with the war."

She noted her delight at seeing many families with young children and teens walking the battlefields. "It was great seeing kids in elementary school wearing kepis (uniform caps of the era) and running around with their little toy rifles. I suspect they'll never forget those experiences."

Ulmer said she was looking forward to sharing the information she obtained with her students and with other teachers in Region XV.

"I am determined to make history fun for the students and to make it relevant to their lives!" She concluded, "I'm already planning for next year's Institute, when the focus will be on battles at Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg."

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Museum: Civil War Surrender Document No Photocopy
By Dan Robrish

8/2/2008

Associated Press (National)

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5iWDjKt-sk06obNGrymqVhEowwGNAD92A3NAG0>

PHILADELPHIA, PA - Officials at a small Civil War museum made an intriguing discovery while sifting through storage: A document long treated as a photo reproduction of the terms of Gen. Robert E. Lee's surrender appears, upon closer inspection, to contain actual signatures and date to 1865.

Museum officials believe they have one of the three original documents signed by representatives of the Union and Confederacy in Appomattox Court House, Va., on April 10, 1865, a day after Lee's surrender.

The National Park Service historian at Appomattox said it's more likely a souvenir copy signed by the same men at that time — still a significant discovery, he said, even if it's not an official copy.

The Civil War & Underground Railroad Museum of Philadelphia has held the document since the early 20th century. It was pulled out of storage and re-evaluated as officials prepared for the museum's shutdown Saturday ahead of its move to a new building.

Curator Andrew Coldren said he is certain that museum officials knew what they had when the document was donated but its significance was forgotten over time because of a lack of record keeping.

In a 1967 inventory, someone wrote "Copy??" in reference to the document.

Coldren said it had been glued to a cardboard backing and varnished, an apparent attempt to preserve it. "Old photostat copies from the '20s and '30s are shiny like that, so this is why you'd think this is not a real document," he said.

Coldren said museum officials examining the document recently noticed that the indentation of pens into the paper was visible. He said they also noticed that the ink on the document was darker and lighter in places, as would be expected with the pens used at the time. The lines on a photostat would be of consistent darkness.

"You can see where they're dipping the pen in to get more ink," he said.

Details of the terms and conditions of the surrender were worked out by six men the day after Lee and Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant agreed on the broad terms of the surrender.

Three copies were made, according to the memoir of Union Gen. John Gibbon, whom Grant put in charge of working out the details of the surrender.

Gibbon kept one copy, according to his memoir and a letter he wrote to the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore when he donated his to the society. Another copy was sent to Grant's headquarters and is now in the National Archives.

By process of elimination, museum officials believe they have the Confederate copy.

Patrick A. Schroeder, historian at Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, said that while there were three official copies, "it doesn't mean that there weren't more copies made."

Schroeder, who saw a photograph of the document, said the stationery looks more like the paper soldiers used to write letters to their loved ones than the paper used for legal documents.

He suggested someone may have made a personal transcript of the document as a souvenir — a common practice at the time — then asked the six men to sign it.

"I would say it's probably a souvenir copy done at the time and signed at the time," Schroeder said.

Without knowing where the donor got the document, he said, it is hard to determine whether it is the official copy provided to the Confederacy. But he said it would be wonderful if that were confirmed.

"I hope it is," he said. "That would be great to have another mystery solved."

The document was donated to the museum by Bruce Ford, a wealthy businessman and son of a Union veteran. He joined the veterans' group that formed the museum around 1917, and the document was noted in an inventory in 1935. How Ford got the document is unknown.

New York memorabilia dealer Keya Morgan said if the document is indeed the missing third copy, what he called a "holy grail to Civil War collectors," it would be worth \$500,000 to \$700,000 at auction, even in its poor condition.

The museum hopes to receive a grant to pay the estimated \$6,000 cost of restoring the document, said Sharon A. Smith, the museum's president and chief executive. Its new home, the former First Bank of the United States, the nation's central bank until the early 19th century, is scheduled to open in 2010.

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General Motors Has Buyer for Land Around Rippavilla

By Jill Cecil Wiersman

7/31/2008

Nashville Tennessean (TN)

<http://tennessean.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080731/COUNTY090101/80731034>

A Canadian corporation is buying more than 500 acres including historic Rippavilla plantation, a General Motors spokeswoman confirmed today.

SLF Acquisitions LLC entered into a contract for the 513.75-acres on Friday, said Kate Neary, spokeswoman for the Spring Hill GM assembly plant. Neary could not disclose details of the contract, like the sale price or SLF's plans for the land, but she said they aim to close by the end of the year.

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"We felt they were the best entity to develop the area in the manner it needs," she said.

The land is actually held by the Maury County Industrial Development Board in lieu of taxes. GM announced it would sell the land as surplus, with the board's approval, and deed about 100 acres next to the plantation to nonprofit Rippavilla Inc. That commitment was included as a condition for SLF's contract, Neary said.

GM also committed to donating \$1 million during the next 10 years for the maintenance of Rippavilla.

Neary said GM has already made the first payment this year.

The 100 acres spans from Rippavilla's frontage straight back from Hwy. 31 and includes a farm museum and mule barn.

GM had entertained previous interest in the land, including an offer from Trace Investments, which halted negotiations in December.

Mayor Danny Leverette said representatives from a Canadian firm had visited him at City Hall in December and talked with him about possible plans for the land. Leverette said he's not sure it's the same entity, but is hopeful based on their verbal presentation.

"They talked about a development they did in Nova Scotia and they were very proud of the green work they've done," he said. "They captured rainwater and used it on site, they did stream repair and worked to bring back some of the natural wildlife."

Leverette said he hopes the development will be sensitive to the land's historical value for its part in the Civil War. The city worked with the Tennessee Historical Commission on a grant application late last year for a \$2 million buy and preserve the Battle of Spring Hill site, near the 500 acres, which is listed as one of the nation's most threatened Civil War battlefields.

“Spring Hill and Maury County has a tremendous gem in the rough,” he said. “We want to plan it properly.”