

Ben Lomond Historic Site to Reopen as Pringle House Hospital

Slave Quarter is Among Renovations

It's the cold that hits visitors first. Even on a sunny, windless day, the slave quarter at Ben Lomond Historic Site reflects the cold starkness of a time when leased slaves worked a 2,000 acre plot of land for the benefit of their masters.

The slave quarter, one of several outbuildings at the Prince William County historic site in Manassas, is undergoing restoration as part of the site's reinterpretation as the Pringle House Hospital. Although the 1832 Ben Lomond house has been open for tours for a number of years, when it reopens in May, the slave quarter, smokehouse and dairy on the property will also be part of the tour.

Ben Lomond has a significant history that began long before the Civil War, but its use as a Confederate hospital after the nearby Battle of First Manassas brought it the most renown.

Built in 1832 by Benjamin Tasker Chinn and Edmonia Carter Chinn, the historic site's main house was called the Pringle House after the surname of its tenants, who ran a store on the property before the Civil War. Union soldiers, campaigning through the area in 1862, left graffiti on the walls of the home, some of which has been preserved and is on display. During the 19th and 20th centuries, various owners raised crops, cattle and sheep, and raced horses at Ben Lomond. Celebrities brought further fame to the property when Congressman John F. Rixey and his wife Ellen purchased Ben Lomond in 1901 and hosted President Theodore Roosevelt there.

Although Lomond was never one of the largest slave holding plantations in the county—both the Chinns and the Pringles probably used no more than 10 slaves--it has one of the few remaining slave quarters in the area. The building was moved from its original location just east of the site in 1980, saving it from demolition.

The sandstone structure, hardly bigger than one of today's garden sheds, has a wooden dividing wall in the middle that would have allowed two families to share its two fireplaces, dirt-floored root cellar, single window and loft. The original sandstone has recently had mortar replaced, but daylight still slants through gaps near the door.

Prince William County Historic Preservation Division Interpreter Bill Backus, who has been working to transform the site into the Pringle House Hospital, says being able to walk inside the slave quarter will illustrate to visitors the reality of a slave's life in a way that books could never do. "It's kind of hard to imagine slave life, acres of corn and wheat and sheep here now that we're surrounded by development. But once you go inside you can imagine a family mending by the fire, telling stories, and keeping slave traditions alive."

When Lomond reopens as the Pringle House Hospital on May 21, one room of the slave quarter will be furnished in a way in keeping with its original residents. It will contain a rope bed and ticking mattresses on the floor, blankets, a table, stools, and reproduction clothing. The other room will focus on the work those slaves did, and will feature reproduction agricultural tools, a spinning wheel, wool cards, and a dutch oven.

Lomond Site Manager Rob Orrison notes that when the property reopens as the Pringle House Hospital, it will have appeal beyond the often gruesome Civil War medicine of the time. "There really is no other place in Prince William County where you can come to learn about agriculture or life on a farm. Here you can also learn about how food was preserved and stored."

The transformation of the site coincides with the county's commemoration of the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War, and is being financed with the help of a grant from the Prince William County Historical Commission. National Museum of Civil War Medicine Executive Director George Wunderlich and county officials will speak when the site opens on May 21, and staff plan a variety of hands-on activities and special tours for the event. A special *You Are There* program is also scheduled at the site on July 23, in the midst of First Battle of Manassas commemorations planned throughout the county and City of Manassas.

The Ben Lomond Historic Site is located at 10321 Sudley Manor Drive in Manassas. Call 703-367-7872 or visit www.pwcgov.org/historicsites for more information.

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Pringle House Hospital Exhibit to Offer Hands-On Experience

When Ben Lomond Historic Site opens a new Pringle House Hospital exhibit on May 21²⁰¹¹, visitors can do more than just imagine the agonized screams of Civil War soldiers and the exhausted doctors who tried to save their lives.

The Prince William County landmark, which served as a Confederate hospital after the First Battle of Manassas, will now offer visitors a hands-on tour that will bring to life the experiences of wounded soldiers, overworked doctors, and anxious family members.

Gleaming bone saws, tourniquets and bandages have been set out on the dining room table. Wooden crutches lean against the entryway walls. Chairs, stationed by rows of ticking mattresses, are draped with uniforms. All the home's furnishings and artifacts have been purchased with an eye toward telling the story of these makeshift Civil War hospitals.

"Whenever possible we've been trying to use reproduction items so everyone can handle them," explains Bill Backus, a Prince William County Historic Preservation Division Interpreter. "This exhibit should give people a better appreciation of the Civil War, and give them a taste for what soldiers and civilians went through in 1861."

On guided tours, visitors will be able to see the primitive surgical tools that would have been used for amputations, feel the heft of reproduction firearms and cartridge boxes, lie down on straw-filled mattresses, try on military uniform jackets, view the toiletries of the day, and fill out their own discharge papers.

Ben Lomond, a prosperous 2,500 acre farm at the start of the Civil War, was one of several area homes requisitioned for use as a hospital due to its proximity to the Manassas battlefield. Although Confederate forces had established hospitals in Richmond, and Union forces used hospitals in Washington, most wounded soldiers could not be evacuated great distances. And so dining room tables like those at Ben Lomond became blood-stained surgical tables, bedrooms became wards for the sick and dying, and hallways became storage depots for crates of medical supplies and food.

Built in 1832 by Benjamin Tasker Chinn and Edmonia Carter Chinn, the historic site's home was called the Pringle House after the surname of its tenants, who ran a store on the property before the Civil War. Andrew and sons Andrew and Thomas Pringle, all natives of Scotland, would have likely fled to an upstairs bedroom with their most prized possessions when Confederate forces created the hospital in their home.

Heather Hembrey, Collections Coordinator with the Historic Preservation Division who has been working with Backus to assemble the exhibit, has taken a special interest in portraying the Pringle family presence in the house. Hembrey has been mindful that although medical and

military supplies would have crowded many of the rooms, the house was still home to the Pringle family.

“I have selected reproduction period dishes, glassware, decorative objects and textiles, and have also made several types of faux foods that represent what the medical staff, soldiers and guests would have eaten, as well as food that nearby civilians would have donated,” Hembrey says of her work on the exhibit.

Unlike many area field hospitals, details about the Pringle House Hospital are mentioned in several memoirs and diaries, and they provide a guide for county staff assembling the exhibit. Edward Craighill, a medical steward who served at the Pringle House Hospital, left behind a memoir detailing his time at Ben Lomond. Whether complaining about the “scanty, poorly cooked rations,” or detailing the doctors, visitors and wounded who arrived at the house, Craighill’s accounts are invaluable.

One of the hospital’s patients mentioned in that diary was William Fitzhugh Lee, a distant cousin to Robert E. Lee. After being mortally wounded in the First Battle of Manassas, Colonel Lee was transported to Ben Lomond. His wife, Lilly Lee, traveled to the hospital shortly after the battle to nurse her husband. She was with him when he died there, and begged Craighill to find a coffin for him. The Pringle exhibit includes a reproduction of Lee’s military coat.

As Ben Lomond fills with artifacts that illustrate its storied past, Historic Preservation Division staff looks forward to welcoming visitors. “I hope that visitors will leave with an understanding of how chaotic things were in that house after First Manassas. I hope that the objects we display will help them imagine the house filled with wounded and dying soldiers and the surgeons and other medical staff using the skills and tools they had to treat these men,” Hembrey says.

“I also hope that visitors will appreciate the Pringles' situation as their home and farm were taken over by the Confederate medical staff. Having their property displaced or destroyed and having to see and hear men dying in their dining room, parlor and bedrooms must have been a horrific experience. As visitors visit each room in the house and immerse themselves in the spaces--as well as touch some objects--I hope that each person can somehow relate to what people experienced there in July of 1861,” Hembrey concludes.

The Pringle House Hospital exhibit is part of the county’s commemoration of the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War, and is being financed with the help of a grant from the Prince William County Historical Commission. National Museum of Civil War Medicine Executive Director George Wunderlich and county officials will speak during a free grand opening event beginning at 10 a.m. on May 21, and staff plan a variety of hands-on activities and special tours for the event. A special *You Are There* program is also scheduled at the site on July 23, in the midst of First Battle of Manassas commemorations planned throughout the county.

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