

General

BIG BARBECUE

Johnston's

By KARL S. REINER
Centre View

West of Centreville, I-66 passes through the historic Thoroughfare Gap. At the Prince William-Fauquier county line, the highway crosses Broad Run. Next to the westbound lanes on the right side of the road, on the bank of the run, stands a forlorn six-story building that was known as Chapman's Mill during the Civil War.

The site was perfect for a mill because Broad Run drops over 80 feet in a very short distance. The fast-moving water provided ample power to operate grinding machinery. It is an impressive stone structure, probably originally built around 1750 by slaves. When the Manassas Gap railroad was extended past the mill in 1852, business increased. The mill was rebuilt about 1858 to its present six-story size. It was the pride and joy of its owner, John Chapman. The quality of the construction stands to this day as a silent tribute to the skill and craftsmanship of the slaves who built it.

Early in the war, the Confederate Subsistence Department established a meat-curing facility at the mill to supply the Confederate Armies. Why it was located so close to the front lines is anyone's guess. The Confederate Government probably believed it was going to be a short war in the halcyon days when federal control barely

reached beyond Washington's defenses.

By the time Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's army was fortified around Centreville and Manassas in late 1861, the plant was operating at full capacity. Two million pounds of meat were in the curing process, and large herds of cattle were on hand for future slaughter.

When Johnston evacuated Centreville in early March 1862, the army had to destroy a large quantity of supplies that could not be removed. At the meat plant, troops gave the local residents all they could carry. D.H. Hill's brigade, withdrawing from Leesburg, loaded wagons full to take with them. Despite the troops' best efforts, more than 1 million pounds of meat remained when the army departed. To keep the meat from falling into Union hands, the torch was put to the building. The smell of burning meat carried for 20 miles. Local residents fondly remembered the smell for a long time, especially in the lean war years.

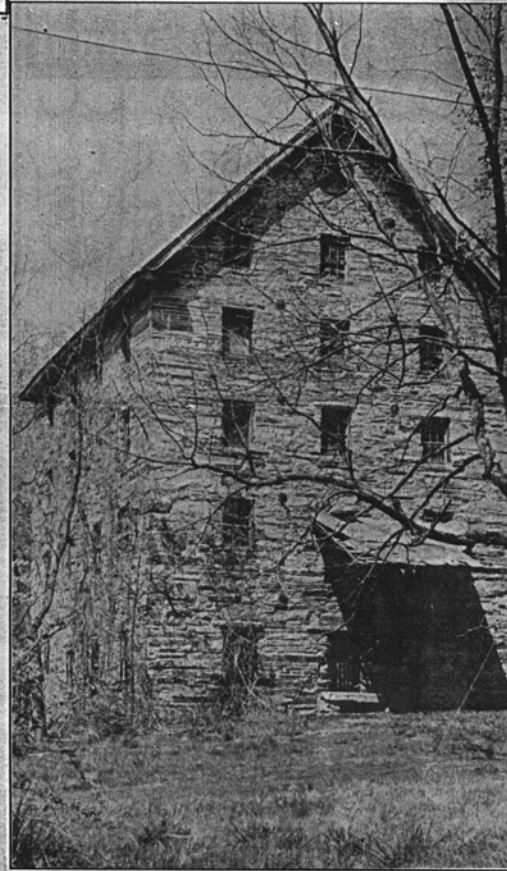
The fire destroyed most of the wooden interior. The sturdy stone walls, however, survived to be used another day. In August 1862, Stonewall Jackson's forces marched by the mill on their way to raid the Union supply depot at Manassas Junction and



Gen. Joseph E. Johnston

provoke the Second Battle of Manassas (Bull Run). On Aug. 28-29, they were followed by the remainder of Lee's army, which drove a defending Union force out of the gap while en route to the battlefield. Gen. Longstreet's troops fought the Union defenders at the nearby quarry, which provided the stones for the mill's construction, and on the mill grounds. Union sharpshooters in the building made it very tough for the advancing Confederates.

The strain of incessant combat, guerilla activity in the area and the ruination of the mill broke John Chapman. He died insane in 1866,



SMOKED: John Chapman's Mill or Beverley's Mill. During the Confederate withdrawal from the lines around Centreville and Manassas in March 1862, more than 1 million pounds of meat was burned there.

and left no heirs. About 1870, Robert Beverley acquired the property. The mill's interior was rebuilt, and it became known as Beverley's Mill.

Norma Burton, the clerk at the Broad Run Post Office, remembers that the mill operated until approximately 1951. It was closed when it became noncompetitive. She remembers her parents buying ground meal on Sundays in the little stone building in front of the mill.

Although privately owned, the

mill has been sadly neglected for many years. One of Northern Virginia's most prominent early industrial landmarks is falling into ruin. It is also a testament to the poor planning and horrendous supply problems of the Civil War. That is why it was the site of the largest barbecue ever held in the region. The mill has too much historical significance to be permitted to decay. It is a shame that it has not been utilized for a useful commercial purpose.

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