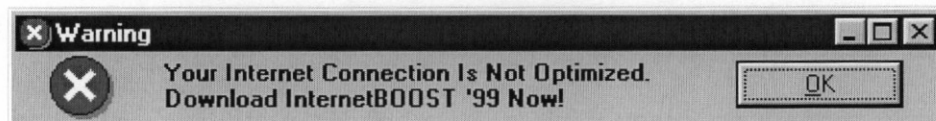


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To Rise from the Ashes

To millions of commuters each year, Beverley's Mill has been a dependable reminder of bygone eras. Sitting at the east end of Thoroughfare Gap, Virginia, aside Route 66 and along the frothy banks of Broad Run, the mill appeared much as it had for more than one hundred years. The five-story structure was a familiar sight to train workers as they rumbled past on the old Manassas Gap Railroad, just twenty feet from the mill's stone walls.

But in recent years, students and historians had become increasingly worried about the mill's condition. Close examinations revealed decay: crumbling mortar, broken windows, and sagging roof beams. A steady procession of vandals tracked through the building. Meanwhile, a mysterious absentee owner seemed to pay no mind to the mill. Her only investments were some boards to cover the long-broken windows and "No Trespassing" signs (which virtually everyone ignored) to satisfy liability lawyers. Year after year preservationists wondered if anything was going to be done to save the place.

On October 22, 1998, the inevitable happened. A vandal left behind something much more insidious than spray paint and broken glass: fire. In a few minutes the magisterial structure was engulfed in flames. Firefighters could do nothing to stop the blaze. Roof, floors, and a wonderful collection of old milling machinery were consumed by the fire. Within a couple of hours all that remained of the mill were its massive stone walls.

This fire represents the second time destruction has been visited upon the mill. The first came 140 years ago and is indeed one of the reasons the mill possesses such allure for students of the Civil War.

Before the advent of the internal-combustion engine, undulating terrain and gaps in mountains mattered a great deal to industry and commerce. The Virginia Piedmont has few more dramatic mountain passageways than Thoroughfare Gap through the Bull Run Mountains, just a few miles west of Haymarket. To the north looms Mother Leathercoat, to the south Pond Mountain. Through the gap tumble the waters of Broad Run. For travelers, passage through the gap requires no ascent or descent. Indeed, without a glance to either side one would not even know that he is passing through a mountain range. It is therefore no surprise that Thoroughfare Gap became a busy--and eventually famous--place.

Jonathan Chapman chose the gap for his new mill in the mid-1700s, building a three-story stone building on the site of the present mill. The location was ideal. Water from Broad Run turned the millstones. Roads west led to the ever-expanding farms in

western Virginia; roads east led to the ports on the Potomac (notably Alexandria). Around Chapman's Mill grew a small community--the ruins of which are plainly visible in the woods around the mill. That community would survive, and the Chapman family would grind wheat and corn for Piedmont farmers, for the next one hundred years.

Major change came to Thoroughfare Gap with the construction of the Manassas Gap Railroad in the 1850s. Linking the Shenandoah Valley to Manassas and then Alexandria, the railroad offered the Chapmans prospects for bigger markets and bigger profits. Consequently, then-owner John Chapman decided to expand his operation. Slaves and other workers swarmed over the slope of Mother Leathercoat to quarry stone. Trestles, ropes, pulleys, horses, and people hauled the huge stones down the slope to the mill. The quarried rock was used to expand the size of the mill. When completed in 1858, Chapman's Mill loomed more than five stories tall. In 1981, Virginia historian Henry M. Douglas called the finished product of Chapman's slaves and stonemasons "the most outstanding and impressive of any mill still standing in northern Virginia."

John Chapman's quest for a payoff from his considerable investment in the mill became another victim of war. The same characteristics that made Thoroughfare Gap attractive for purposes of commerce also gave it military importance. Mountain ranges served as natural bulwarks to Civil War armies--bulwarks that could only be penetrated at the gaps. As soon as the armies of North and South had gathered in northern Virginia, they started paying close attention to the passageway between Mother Leathercoat and Pond Mountain.

The Confederates came first. On July 21, 1861, thousands of Confederate soldiers laid eyes on John Chapman's Mill as they whisked through the gap aboard rail cars on their way to join the fighting near Manassas. Months later, John Chapman went into business with the Confederate government when General Joseph E. Johnston turned Chapman's Mill into a huge meat-packing operation. By March 1862, more than two million pounds of meat were cured or in storage at Thoroughfare Gap--much of it in the mill. Additional sources of meat rooted or grazed in the nearby fields in the form of herds of hogs and cattle. Such bounty also presented a transportation problem to the Southerners. When the Confederates abandoned northern Virginia in March 1862, they did not have the means to transport the stores at Chapman's Mill. What could not be given away to local civilians was burned. For John Chapman, the sojourn into the meat-packing business proved profitable; he earned thirteen hundred dollars from the Confederate government for the use of his buildings and land.

With the arrival of Federal troops, Thoroughfare Gap became a pleasant and oft-described post for a succession of units. Just wide enough for the passage of Broad Run, the Front Royal to Manassas Road (modern Route 55), and the Manassas Gap Railroad, Thoroughfare Gap was nothing if not picturesque. Chapman's Mill and the "dark, gloomy cleft" that loomed on either side of it were invariably the focus of artists' and soldiers' pens. "Its echoes were wonderful," wrote one soldier, and "a gun fired in its depth gave forth roars fit to bring down the skies."

Gunfire and fame would come to Thoroughfare Gap and Chapman's Mill in late August 1862. On August 26, Maj. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson led his twenty-

four thousand Confederates past the mill in one of the most daring and exhausting marches of the war. Jackson, with about one-half of General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, was headed to the rear of the Union Army of Virginia, commanded by the boisterous Maj. Gen. John Pope. Jackson's plan was to cut Pope's supply line at Manassas Junction and force the loathed Federal commander to yield his bothersome position along the Rappahannock River. Jackson's men swept through Thoroughfare Gap at midday on the twenty-sixth en route to the perfect execution of Jackson's and Lee's plan. Not a Union soldier impeded them. The only blue-coated soldiers to learn of Jackson's march were a handful of bandsmen who could warn no one because they fell into Stonewall's hands at Haymarket.

Lee's plan called for Maj. Gen. James Longstreet, with about thirty thousand men, to follow Jackson by two days and reunite with him east of the Bull Run Mountains. To do that, Lee knew, Longstreet would have to pass through Thoroughfare Gap. And there, Lee also knew, the Yankees could do much to impede or even foil Longstreet's march--and hence the reunification of the Confederate army.

It was therefore with no small relief that on the afternoon of August 28 Longstreet and Lee arrived on the hills west of the gap to discover the place undefended. Lee, satisfied with the day's march, ordered Longstreet into bivouac. Prudently, Longstreet ordered a regiment of Georgians ahead to move through the gap and secure it for the advance to join Jackson the next morning.

It was well that they did. Immediately after receiving Longstreet's instructions, Colonel George T. Anderson led his regiment into the gap past Chapman's Mill. The Georgians moved nearly a mile beyond the gap when they received a shock--a Federal division was marching toward them.

Pope's subordinate Maj. Gen. Irvin McDowell recognized the importance of Thoroughfare Gap and a few hours earlier had dispatched Brig. Gen. James Ricketts' division toward the gap. If Thoroughfare could be seized, McDowell knew that the two halves of the Confederate army might be held apart long enough for each to be defeated in detail. Unfortunately for the Federals, McDowell acted too late.

As the head of Ricketts' division swung up the road from Haymarket, the lead brigade, commanded by Colonel John Stiles, collided with Anderson's Georgians. Anderson sent word back to Longstreet that he had met opposition, then retreated back toward Thoroughfare Gap, where his outnumbered troops could make use of the rugged terrain to aid their defense.

The Georgians tumbled back into the gap and were met by more troops from their brigade. Anderson deployed his men along and north of Broad Run, from just west of Chapman's Mill up the slope of Mother Leathercoat. Federals from the Thirteenth Massachusetts pushed forward and, lacking advantageous terrain, clambered into the mill. Other Union troops moved up to the right of the mill and the railroad, only to encounter Chapman's huge and impassable quarry ditch--a feature still visible.

For more than an hour the Federals tried to force the Confederates back through Thoroughfare Gap, but the task was like trying to push an oversized cork into a bottle. The Confederates would not budge. In the midst of the mayhem stood Chapman's Mill,

its exterior splattered with lead, its interior scattered with the cartridge papers of Massachusetts infantrymen. Likewise, the fire of the infantrymen in the mill deadened any Confederate advance. Instead, Georgians scrambled up the slopes of Mother Leathercoat until they confronted the Federals along Chapman's quarry ditch. At the quarry a vicious fight between Pennsylvanians and Georgians raged, the two sides separated by only the twenty-foot-wide ditch. Each side would fire and retreat below the crest of the gash. "It was like fighting on the top of a house," recorded one of the Georgians.

The Pennsylvanians along the quarry ditch suffered more after the Confederates finally quelled the Bay Staters on the mill's second floor and pushed forward to capture it. This put the Rebels squarely on the Pennsylvanians' flank, and soon the men from the Keystone State were tumbling down the ridge.

Still, the fighting in the gap proper proved indecisive. Decision instead came on the flanks, where the Confederates managed to ascend Mother Leathercoat (north of the mill) and then descend on the Union right flank. Just before sunset the Union infantry yielded. Federal cannon kept up a desultory fire on the gap till dark, then withdrew. The Union effort to halve the Confederate army by seizing Thoroughfare Gap failed--largely because the effort came too late. The next morning, Longstreet and his thirty thousand men would wend their way over the previous day's carnage around the mill and rejoin Jackson on the Bull Run battlefield. Two days later, Lee would win one of his most decisive victories of the war.

During the next two years, Thoroughfare Gap would be one of the most heavily trodden landscapes in northern Virginia. Occasional skirmishes flared at the gap between small units of both sides. Bivouacking soldiers used, destroyed, or vandalized, much of what remained of Chapman's mill works. By mid-1863, Chapman's Mill had been gutted--no floors, no windows, and by one account a burned roof. Indeed, its condition was not dissimilar to its appearance in the wake of the 1998 fire.

The hardships of war took a heavy toll on John Chapman. His business never recovered, and he entered an asylum in Staunton, where he died in 1866. The mill soon went to the Beverley family (hence its current name of Beverley's Mill). A succession of owners followed, and each contributed to the rehabilitation of the mill. Water from Broad Run continued to power the mill's machinery until the 1920s. The mill was modernized with electrical power and continued to operate until January 1951, when, faced with citations from the Food and Drug Administration for rodent infestation, the owners closed the doors for good. With much of the machinery still in place, the mill would sit neglected for the next forty-seven years.

Fire in a grand old building is always a tragedy. Yet, as so often is the case, tragedy focuses attention. In the wake of the October 1998 fire, Beverley's Mill received a blizzard of publicity. Engineers have determined that the gutted walls are indeed stable--an eloquent testament to the exquisite work of Chapman's slaves and stonemasons. Heat from the fire did damage the building's mortar, but experts agree the damage can be repaired.

The handful of people who had for years been interested in the fate of the mill have emerged as the leaders in a new effort to save what is left. The absentee landowner has

donated the mill and its surrounding eight acres to the preservationists. The "Turn the Mill Around Campaign" is actively raising funds to ensure that the mill survives for future generations. Ironically, the task of saving the mill's remnants--before the fire a multi-million dollar impossibility--is now a workable, two-hundred-thousand-dollar project. Soon, the mill will be integrated into the Bull Run Preserve--an expansive tract on the slopes of Mother Leathercoat that encompasses much of the Thoroughfare Gap battlefield and the community that surrounded the mill (including the ruins of Meadowville, the old Chapman homestead).

In a way, history has come full circle; the mill today looks much as it did in 1863 at the height of the Civil War--a gutted shell with an immense story to tell, an artifact eminently worthy of preservation. The fire need not be the end of Beverley's Mill but rather yet another permutation in its sometimes tumultuous history. The mill remains the defining feature of both the Thoroughfare Gap battlefield and a long-forgotten industrial community. It remains an elegant reminder of times gone by, when gaps in mountains mattered. After all the neglect and one spectacular disaster, there may be life yet in those stately walls built aside the banks of Broad Run. For further information, write to the Turn the Mill Around Campaign at P.O. Box 207, Broad Run, VA 20137, or call (703) 753-3273.

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