



By Steve Davis-Potomac News

Park superintendent Ken Apschnikat stands next to the old frame house on the battlefield.

Battlefield site called a risk

By PAMELA GOULD
Manassas Bureau

The site where the Battle of Second Manassas began 130 years ago this month has become a safety risk because of a decaying, Reconstruction-era house standing there, Manassas National Battlefield Park Superintendent Ken Apschnikat said Friday.

The National Park Service bought the 319.5-acre site and a house on it in 1985 and is trying to decide what to do about the boarded-up, two-story wood frame house on the property.

"It bothers me that we've got that big a safety risk," Apschnikat said.

A split-rail fence surrounds the house. But a chain-link fence is to be erected soon to prevent people from entering the unstable, rotting structure until a decision is made about its future.

Apschnikat said he will be meeting next week in Washington, D.C., with historians and Park Service experts on period architecture and archaeology to further discuss the building.

The government sought the land because of its significance to the Battle of Second Manassas, which raged for three days starting on Aug 28, 1862.

From the south side of the original Brawner house, Confederate Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson spied Union forces

headed eastward along what today is U.S. 29, but was then known as the Alexandria-Warrenton Turnpike.

Jackson led his men on a surprise attack that was the first stage of the battle that "brought the Confederacy to the height of its power," according to park officials.

The original Brawner house suffered severe damage during the battle. What stands today was built in part in 1868 and added onto in 1905, according to Park Service documents.

The original house stood two stories high and had four rooms. The present structure shows traces of Victorian architecture and is L-shaped.

Apschnikat said it would take about \$250,000 just to stabilize the house, not restore it. And he stressed that the Park Service does not see this structure as one that complements the goal of Manassas National Battlefield Park — preserving the history of the two battles fought there.

The Park Service wants to spend money on structures of that period, such as the Henry House and the Stone House.

"There's nothing that we can document that [the current house] has any historic significance," Apschnikat said.

Restoring the standing struc-

ture would be like the managers of Colonial Williamsburg deciding to restore a Civil War-era home; it would not be in keeping with the history that they're trying to portray, he explained.

But Apschnikat stressed that the fate of the building is far from decided. Before a decision is reached, he said, the Park Service will consider at least four options and then will seek public opinion, either through the media, letters to historic groups and citizens or through public hearings.

"We don't want to operate in a vacuum," he said amid the tall grass outside the house. "We want public involvement."

Apschnikat said the four options currently being discussed are stabilizing the house, demolishing the house, taking it apart as a lesson for historians to analyze construction materials and methods of various time periods, or doing nothing and letting the house eventually fall down.

If the building is torn down, Apschnikat said he feels the best way to enhance the visualization of the 1862 battle is for the Park Service to uncover the foundation of the original Brawner House. Visitors to the park could then imagine where the house stood and where the Union and Confederate forces fought those three days, he explained.