

nomination filed to designate more than 1,100 acres of Bristow, when she stated in its environmental review that there were no graves and nothing environmentally significant about the Bristow area.

The owner stated that there are two small grave sites — one a private cemetery and the other the grave of Civil War soldiers who died of disease (not in battle). As a keeper of his own land, he stated the plot should be preserved. Most of these graves have now been destroyed by trespassers digging for relics and collecting tombstones.

The Virginia General Assembly's new "Historical Destruction Act," as the Save the Battlefield Coalition recently called it, attempts to ensure the state Department of Historic Resources property notifies all property owners of its intention to "preserve all locations designated as being [historically] significant."

It allows the property owners to state their objections to any loss of "quiet enjoyment" or to labeling of their property as historic. If a majority of the property owners object, the property will not be designated as historic, and the general public will not be encouraged to trespass on private land.

The legislation recently led the state Board of Historic Resources to remove the Bristoe Station and Brandy Station battlefields from the Virginia Landmark Register, because of overwhelming objections by property owners.

Ironically, the Commonwealth of Virginia sold the entire Robert Bristow estate in 1834, guaranteeing the right of "quiet enjoyment." Some landowners have solicited the county, state and federal governments, as well as private organizations, to purchase their property at market value, but obviously officials have not felt it is that significant.

The state and federal historic designations damaged property owners emotionally and financially, and destroyed the "quiet enjoyment" they once held. Their land is frequently disrupted by unwanted tourists, knocking on their doors, and trespassers entering their property. The other Sunday, approximately 35 tourists from the Capitol Hill Civil War Round Table cordially invited themselves to once again trespass and risk their lives while they toured the Bristow area along the Norfolk Southern railroad tracks.

Thanks to the brainchild of responsible representatives like state Sen. Charles J. Colgan, D-Prince William, and Delegate Harry J. Parrish, R-Manassas, the citizens of the commonwealth are now more likely to receive the due process guaranteed by our Constitution.

The methods formerly used by the the Department of Historic Resources and

Napoleonic historians to put unwanted labels on private property often lead to destruction, not preservation, of cultural resources and property owners' rights.

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Historic districts harm landowners

Napoleon Bonapart once stated that "History is nothing more than a set of lies which have been agreed upon."

According to an archaeological study performed by the College of William and Mary in 1989, Prince William County's Bristow area is not historically significant and does not qualify as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

This unbiased report clearly documents the insignificance of the Civil War battle fought at Bristoe Station. Even Hugh Miller, director of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, has stated that the area of "most significant fire" was not historically significant.

The report's field review noted that the "average depth to subsoil seldom exceeded one foot." The subsoil consist of hard shale. It is unrealistic to believe any soldiers' mass graves exist within the area previously designated a state and national historic landmark, as the Catharpin-based Save the Battlefield Coalition incorrectly asserts. More than 90 percent of this soil has been cultivated, without signs of bones, since the Civil War ended nearly 130 years ago.

In 1988, during Prince William's review of the Bristow area for a proposed landfill, one property owner corrected former County Archaeologist Jan Townsend, the author of the National Register