



The "dairy" at Mt. Air, 9101 Lee Highway, before 1945. (Courtesy Mrs. Rita Covington)



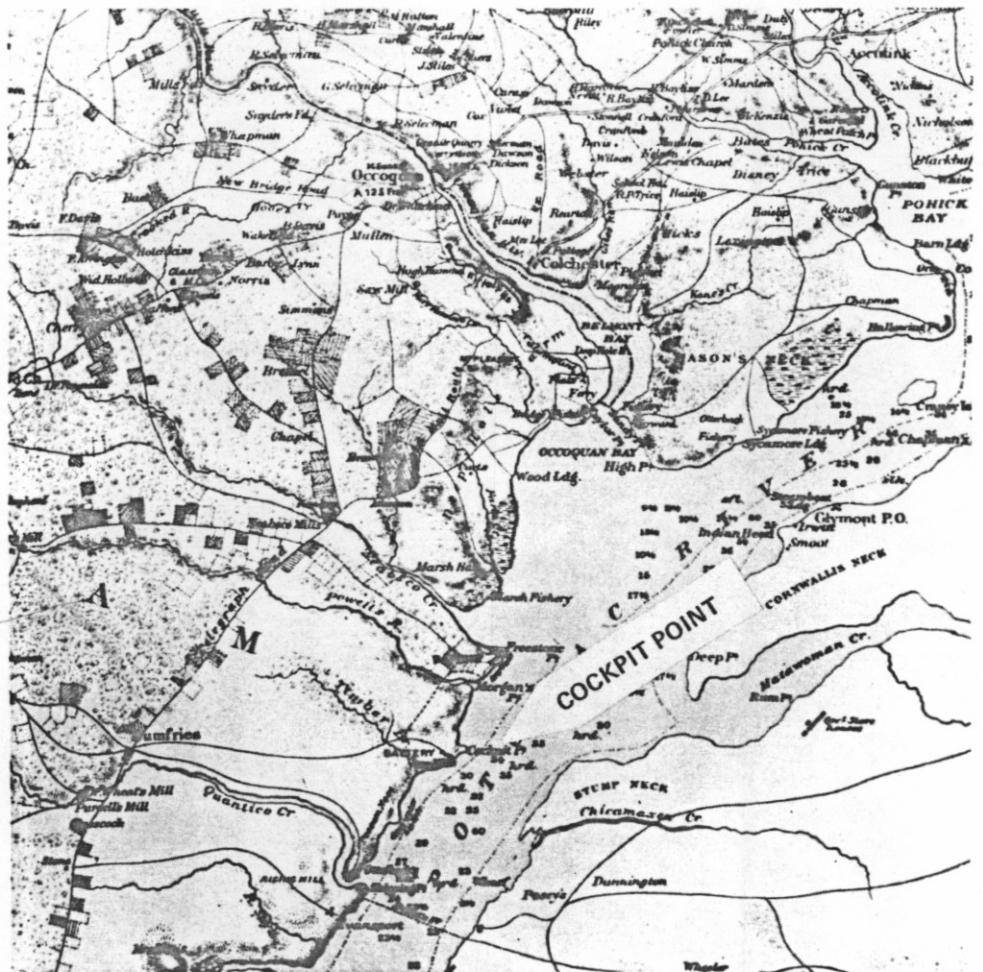
Rita (Thompson) Covington and Florence (Bray) Stevens at Hatmark School, 9333 Lee Highway, in 1909. The building is still there. It has been remodeled and is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Starkey. (Courtesy Rita Covington)

Possum Nose—Confederate River Battery on the Potomac. Can it be Saved?

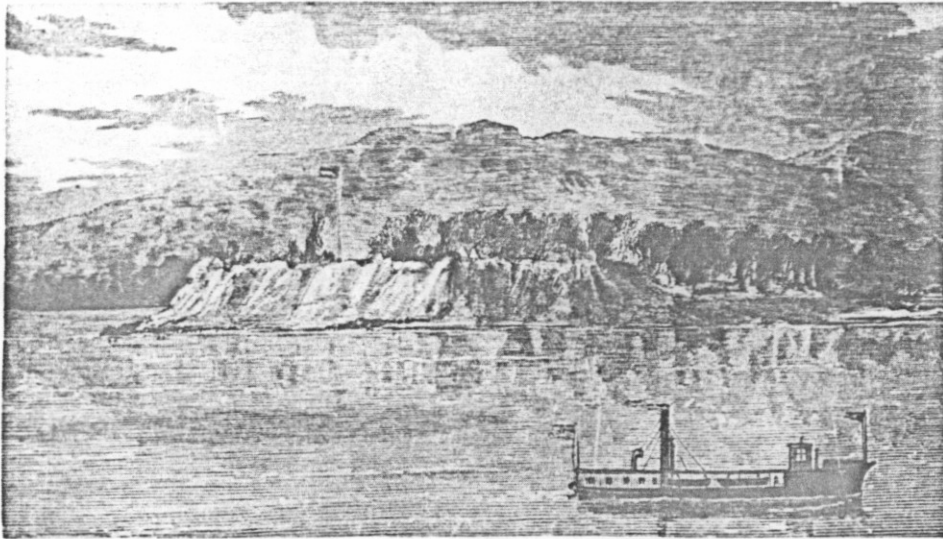
by Mary Alice Wills

When the United States' Civil War began, the focal point for the North's military preparations was Washington, D.C. Thousands of soldiers assembled in the city as the Army of the Potomac was organized. They camped in public buildings, parks and vacant lots. Although some came by train, many came by ship as did most of their supplies. Washington was a port city with its principal wharves at the foot of Sixth and Seventh Streets. Steamers, schooners, packets and tugs plied their way up the Potomac River loaded to capacity with tents, uniforms, blankets, cooking utensils, provisions, arms, horses, cattle, wagons, reels of insulated wire for the telegraph, and more and more soldiers.

The secessionists in Virginia, who watched the hundreds of ships going up and down the river, realized that their most immediate opportunity for harassing the Union and perhaps even strangling Washington rested along the Potomac River. Just as President Lincoln was blockading the Southern ports, they hoped to blockade the Capital of the Union. During the summer of 1861, the Confederacy secretly built heavy batteries behind shields of trees on the more strategic points along the lower Potomac



Map shows location of Cockpit Point on north side of Timber Branch between Neabsco and Quantico Creeks. (Courtesy National Archives)



Cockpit Point Battery as seen from the Potomac River. (Sketch by Arthur Lumley, 1862)

such as Evansport, Shipping Point and Cockpit Point. A smaller one was constructed on Freestone Point. They were located in Prince William County, Virginia.

On October 15, 1861, the Confederates revealed their Evansport guns. They cut down the shield of trees and engaged a Union ship going down the river. Those at Shipping Point and Cockpit Point were also disclosed. These batteries, when at full strength, contained an unknown number of small guns and approximately thirty-seven heavy guns, some of which were captured from the Union at Manassas. From October 1861 until March 1862, Washington, D.C., was a blockaded city! The Potomac River, Washington's principal avenue of supply and communication was officially closed by order of the United States Navy.

No ships carrying government supplies were allowed up the Potomac. Instead, they were sent to Baltimore where the stores were transferred to trains of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company. A single-track branch line connected that city with Washington. With equipment and men borrowed from other lines, the B&O managed to convey to Washington an adequate amount of food, fuel, and supplies. It, alone, prevented Washington, D.C., from becoming a totally besieged city.

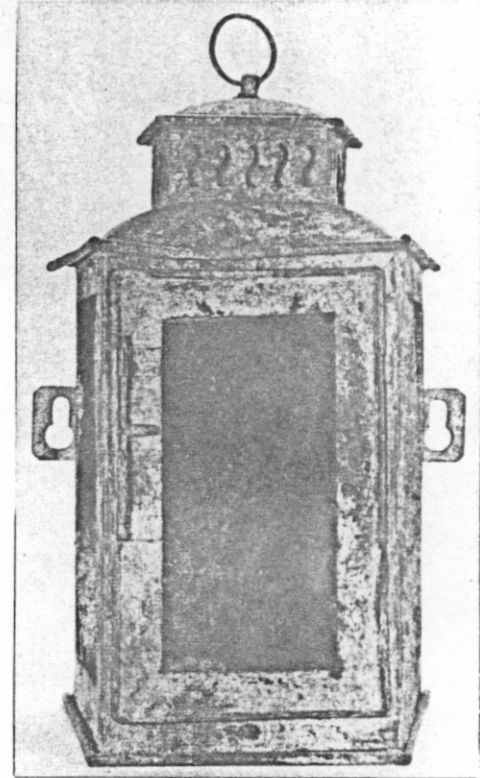
Neither the United States Navy's Potomac Flotilla nor Union batteries on the opposite Maryland shore were able to drive the Confederates from their positions. And General George B. McClellan, at a cost of his own prestige, refused even the supplications of President Lincoln to undertake a major expedition

to dislodge them. Washington endured the humiliation of being blockaded until the Confederate Army withdrew from Northern Virginia on March 9, 1862, and abandoned the batteries.

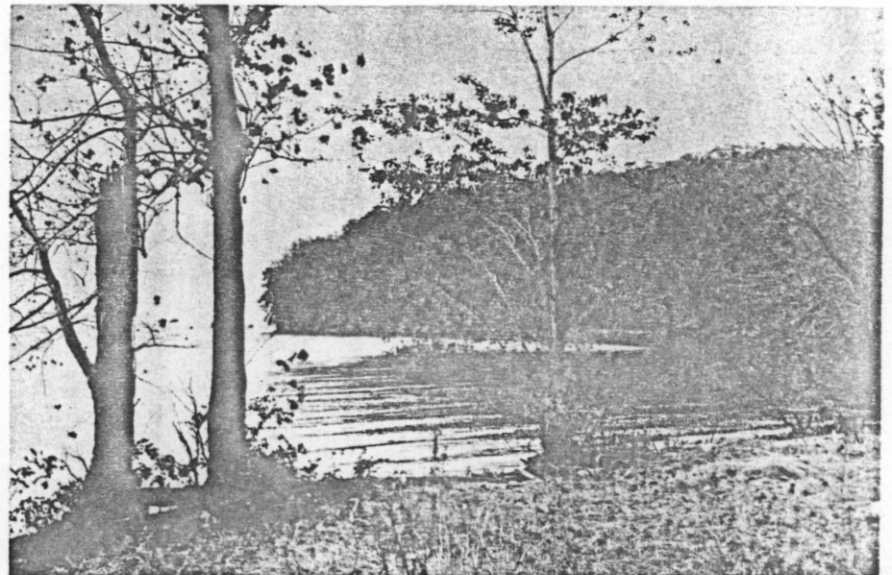
The heaviest concentration of guns was at Shipping Point and Evansport. The areas are now within the confines of the Quantico Marine Base and the earthworks for the batteries were destroyed as the Base developed. A hospital, for example, is located on Shipping Point. A few small fortifications exist today on Freestone Point, the smallest of the above mentioned batteries. The most extensive and well-preserved site of a heavy Confederate battery is on a beautiful, sixteen

acre, wooded hill called Possum Nose, which was the Cockpit Point battery. During the Civil War, Cockpit Point and Possum Nose were regarded as one point, not two, and together were called Cockpit Point.

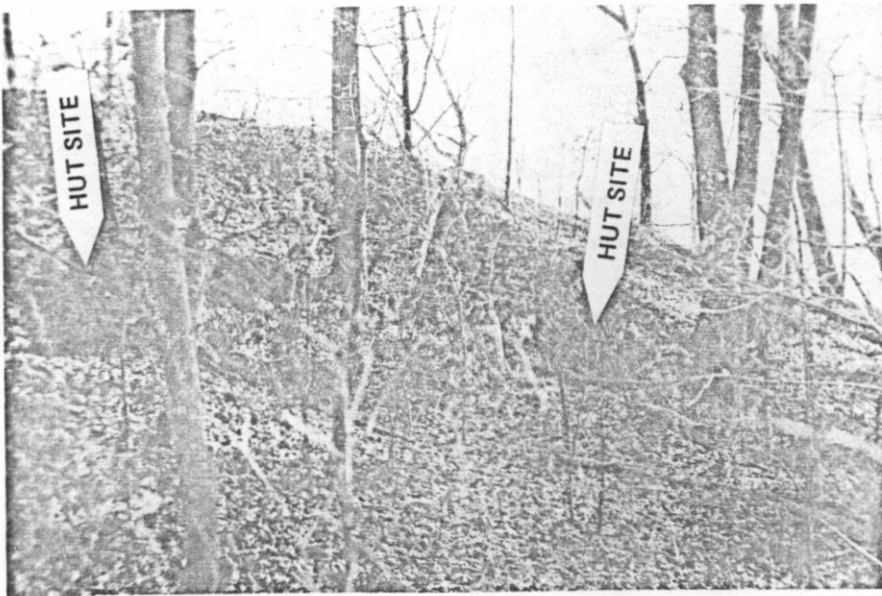
The earthworks for the battery on



This ship's lantern, stamped BNY (Boston Navy Yard) was found on Possum Nose. It probably came from a ship of the Potomac Flotilla. (Photo courtesy Sydney Kerksis)



Possum Nose as seen from Cockpit Point looking south. (Photo by R. J. Wills, November 1972.)



The indentations on the back side of this hill on Possum Nose are cabin or hut sites. (Photo by R. J. Wills, December 1972)

Possum Nose, as well as those for the powder magazine, remain in excellent condition. There are three separate fortifications which were used for guns. The largest, at the tip of Possum Nose fronting the Potomac, probably held two or three guns, including a large 80-pounder which was referred to in reports of the January, 1862, engagement between the battery and two ships of the Potomac Flotilla. On either side of this large earthwork are two smaller ones. One of them must have held a single gun; the other, possibly two.

Since Possum Nose is a seventy-five foot hill with a cliff-like bank, a Union attack on the battery would have had to come from the land side rather than the river's edge. To guard against such an assault, Captain Bushrod W. Frobel, who commanded the battery, had the men of the Fifth Alabama Battalion and a Tennessee Company stationed there, dig winding rifle pits from one side of Possum

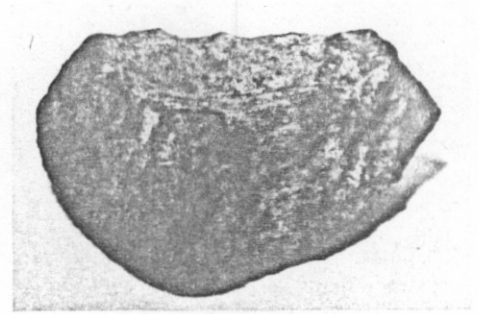
Nose to the other behind the guns. Except for the blankets of leaves and additional trees, they are as they were left.

Winter quarters for those living on Possum Nose consisted of crude wooden huts. The cabins themselves no longer exist but their sites, some with brick fireplaces, can easily be identified. The powder magazine is toward the rear of Possum Nose close to the railroad track.

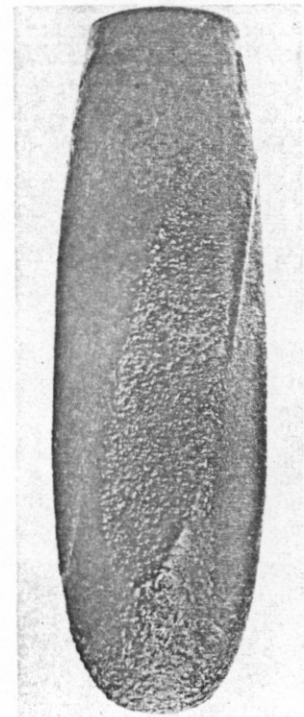
Although Possum Nose has already been recognized as ecologically valuable, there is also enough historical significance to qualify it as a landmark. Yet, one has to wonder how much longer it can be preserved with its ecological and historical character intact. Possum Nose is landlocked and the area around it is industrial. In its immediate vicinity are a major power plant, an asphalt plant, a sanitary landfill, and a proposed synthetic gas plant. To date, private ownership has protected Possum Nose from the effect of the bulldozer. But what of its future? Will it be possible to save it?

Despite vehement objections from adjoining residents, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Monday, March 5th, enfolded the Colvin Run Mill and Dranesville Tavern with protective historic districts.

The effect of the Supervisor's actions is to restrict development on specified portions of a quarter mile circle to one acre lots, with any proposed construction



Fragment of a shell which was fired at the Cockpit Point Battery by a ship of the United States Navy's Potomac Flotilla. (Photo by R. J. Wills, 1972)



Two English Whitworth guns were sent to General Hooker's Division in Maryland opposite the Confederate batteries. This 9½ inch, 12 lb. bolt was fired at the Cockpit Point Battery. (Photo courtesy Sydney Kerksis)

The blockade and its effect on Washington, D.C., is the subject of a new book by Mrs. Wills soon to be released by R. W. Beatty, Ltd., of Arlington, Va.

Colvin Run Mill and Dranesville Tavern Protected by Historic Districts

to be reviewed by the County's Architectural Review Board. Additionally, no structure exceeding 35 feet in height will be permitted, and commercial and industrial uses are prohibited, except on the historic site itself.

Mrs. Mary Fahringer, Chairman of the History Commission, warned that "we'll lose all our historical sites if we're not careful."