

The last witness to war battle

By CHARLES MILLS

Marching 54 miles in 48 hours, Stonewall Jackson passed through Thoroughfare Gap, undiscovered by John Pope's Federal army, and reached the railroad station at Bristow at sunset on August 26, 1862.

That night he captured the immense Union supply depot at Manassas Junction. Jackson spent the 27th supplying his troops from the Union stores. Early in the day a Federal brigade under General G.W. Taylor came out by train from Alexandria to investigate rumors of a cavalry raid on Manassas.

Upon arriving within a quarter of a mile of the Bull Run bridge the Federals found the railroad track and ditches piled high with the debris of two trains which had escaped from Jackson's men the evening before at Bristow. Fleeing through the darkness toward Alexandria, the second train plowed into the rear of the leading one, reducing both to wreckage. Taylor filed his men across the

railroad bridge on foot, deployed, and advanced toward the junction in three lines of battle. On the Liberia plantation, Taylor's troops ran into four brigades of A.P. Hill's division, which had come out to meet them, accompanied by Stuart's cavalry and several batteries.

Shattered by the artillery fire and then attacked in front and on the flanks, the Federals were swept back across Bull Run Creek with 300 casualties, including General Taylor killed; the Federals fled northward toward Fairfax Court House, losing all their equipment.

This action, the dramatic prelude to the Second Battle of Manassas, surged around a brown stone building which until recently seemed destined for the wrecking ball.

As twilight approaches and thousands of bees seep into the gaping crevices of a crumbling brown stone house, it is hard to imagine that this derelict was once the headquarters of the most powerful army in the Confederacy.

The papers of George C. Round, a Union signal corps officer who became a prominent citizen of Manassas after the war, provided the key to unraveling the history of the "Conner House". Round's papers, unearthed by Manassas historian Van Naiswald, describe Manassas in 1865.

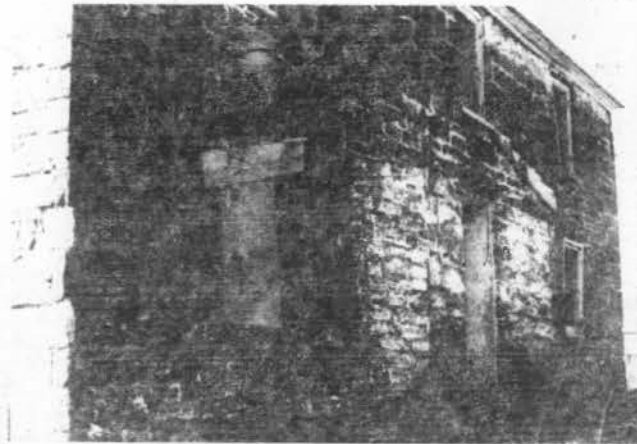
Round refers to a stone house east of the city which served as the headquarters of General Joseph E. Johnston during the First Battle of Manassas, and as a field hospital after the Second Battle of Manassas.

Census and tax records indicate no other stone house in the area except what is now called the "Conner House".

Archaeological excavations confirm the evidence of the historical records. Excavations conducted by the Northern Virginia Community College produced an array of Civil War artifacts. Repairs made under one window for damage done by a cannon shell are clearly visible.

The east chimney, reported in writings of the period to have been struck

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By Don Trayer

CONNER HOUSE - Confederate headquarters and later a field hospital during the Civil War.

WITNESS

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by cannon fire, shows signs of repair. Portions of the older stone chimney have clearly been replaced by other material.

Based on both archaeological and documentary evidence, the Virginia Historical Landmark Commission recently added the Conner House to the state's official register of properties worthy of preservation.

The City of Manassas Park Woman's Club has undertaken the formidable job of preserving, stabilizing and restoring the house, a job which will cost an estimated \$350,000.

Rescued from destruction at the last minute, the Conner House stands

for future generations as a haunting reminder of a tragic war. (The Conner House is located on Conner Drive in Manassas Park, near the New Dominion School.)

Editor's note: In an effort to generate interest among county residents and promote tourism, the Tourism Council of Prince William County has asked local history buffs to submit articles which will be considered for publication in newspapers and historical periodicals. Articles should be sent to: Historical Advisory Committee, Tourism Council of Prince William County, P.O. Box 202, Occoquan, Va. 22125.

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