



Preserving the Past

Bennie Scarton-The Journal Messenger

Visitors' tours of the battlefield begin here at the visitors' center. During their tour they may be fortunate enough to see some of the restoration work at the Stone House and Dogan House, two structures dating back to pre-Civil War times. This restoration will help Manassas National

Battlefield Park officials bring the past back to life. Christian Bookter, the man most responsible for the work, also spends a great deal of time working to preserve the Stone Bridge, another structure suffering from old age.

Stonemason Restores Battlefield Buildings

By ROBERT KUREK
JM Staff Writer

While he can be found most mornings working to restore the Stone Bridge, Christian Bookter is also leaving his historical preservationist mark on a number of other battlefield projects.

Employed by the Manassas National Battlefield Park since the early 1970's, Bookter describes his official occupation as stonemason,

but said during the last few years he has broadened his restoration skills to include brick masonry and carpentry.

"Country primitive" is the architectural style Bookter uses to characterize two of the buildings he is currently working to restore, Dogan House and Stone House.

Knowledge of some carpentry has become especially helpful in his work on the Stone House, where he

said he is planning to replace window wood trimming. He pointed out how the original trimming has deteriorated to such a state that the glass panes are being held together only by the a very fragile network of wood.

The Stone House was originally built in 1828 from stones believed to have been carried from a quarry only about 200 yards away. According to Bookter, historians believe the building was first used as a toll house and tavern for the Fauquier-Alexandria Turnpike, built in 1824. During the Civil War, the house played a prominent role as a field hospital during the two battles fought at Manassas. The house was last occupied in the 1940's before it was taken over by the Park Service.

In one of the upstairs bedrooms, a floorboard bears the engraving, "Breton." Long believed to have been the name of a wounded soldier who was operated on during the First Battle of Manassas, Bookter said an archeological study done in the 1960's showed the name to be that of the original builder.

Bookter said the outside of the Stone House is "very common" for Virginia architecture of the early 19th century, but that the inside is a different matter. Unlike the Stone

House, the interior of buildings from that time period are usually very symmetrical, he noted.

"Everything about this building is structurally sound," Bookter explained, adding it is what former preservationists have done that can cause damage to the house. Like the Stone Bridge, Bookter said his predecessors used the wrong type of mortar to preserve the original stonework.

His job, he said, is to try and reverse the aging process by using more sound techniques which, in most cases, involve utilizing the materials and methods which were originally used to build the the structure.

"If the process can't be reversed, I don't want to fool with it."

Restoring the buildings to a state where they reflect the Civil War period is the goal of battlefield preservationists, but sometimes that means valuable history is lost, Bookter noted. The presence of cannonballs embedded in the walls of the Stone House makes many park visitors forget the house has a rich history long before bullets were flying and men were locked in combat.

The Dogan House, located just
See Structures Restored on A-2.