

# Grave Robbery Prompts Land Acquisition

By DAVID WREN  
JM Staff Writer

The loss of several civil war artifacts to artifact hunters at the Brawner Farm, near the Manassas National Battlefield Park, has prompted the National Park Service to file a "declaration of taking" with the U.S. Congress in order to acquire the 312-acre property and incorporate it into the park's presently owned land.

According to Roland Swain, superintendent of the Manassas Battlefield Park, the resolution was sent to a Congressional committee on Sept. 26 after no agreement could be reached on the sale of the land with the current landowners.

"There are approximately 17 heirs to the land," Swain said. "Most of them were in agreement with our offer for acquisition of the property, however, two of them said they wouldn't agree with the offer. Therefore, we decided to send the resolution for acquisition to Congress."

The National Park Service offered the current landowners \$812,000 for the land. Swain said that acquisition could occur sooner than the 30-day period "if all the landowners came forward and agreed to the sale."

Swain went on to say that he expects one of two outcomes to the land acquisition problem.

"Either the Congressional committee will concur with the resolution within the 30-day period and we'll acquire the land," Swaine said, "or they won't concur and we'll have to wait past the 30-day period for acquisition."

According to a report by the National Park Service, the Brawner Farm at the Manassas National Battlefield Park is the most important historical site within the park's 1980 boundary expansion. The land has never been officially acquired by the park, however.

The report also says that the park has recommended the declaration of taking an immediate acquisition of the property to avoid further

destruction of the land, which "remains much as it was at the time of the Civil War" according to Swain.

During the Civil War, the farm was the site of the August 1862, Second Battle of Manassas.

The National Park Service reported recently that declarations of taking are not common, however, the Brawner Farm meets the requirements for such action. "The site is in immediate danger from artifact hunters," the report states, "because no one lives on the land and no one manages it. People with metal detectors have carried off many historical objects."

According to Swain, the park

decided to proceed with the most rapid acquisition as possible after learning of several grave robbing incidents on the property.

Unknown persons had come onto the land with metal detectors, Swain said, and had unearthed a shallow grave of a Confederate Army soldier. Several metal buttons from the soldier's uniform were taken along with a number of friction primers, a device used to fire cannons.

Swain said the buttons, which are quite valuable, indicated that the soldier was affiliated with the Virginia Military Institute.

The U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee recently agreed to in-

clude \$3 million for further acquisition of land at the park, according to a spokesperson for U.S. Senator John Warner. The spokesperson also said that the bill is now out of committee and currently awaits action by the senate.

The U.S. Congress is scheduled to recess after today's session, however, and no immediate action on the Appropriation Committee's recommendation is expected.

Swain said this will not affect the park's efforts to acquire the Brawner Farm. "Our acquisition of the Brawner Farm is not contingent on the Senate Appropriation Committee's recommendation,"

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## Land

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Swain said. "The money for takeover of the land is available from funds granted us during the 1984 fiscal year."

Some \$3 million dollars was appropriated for the Manassas National Battlefield Park during the 1984 fiscal year, which ended yesterday. The current \$3 million set by the Senate Appropriations Committee will be designated for the 1985 fiscal year.

Swain concluded that acquisition of the Brawner Farm will probably occur after the Oct. 26, 30-day, committee deadline. Acquisition could occur sooner, however, if the committee concurs with the park's resolution before the end of the 30-day period or should the landowners agree to the park's terms of sale.

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Maureen Lathiers—Journal Messenger

### Local events on new bulletin board

Manassas Councilman John Grzejka and Mayor Robert Browne glance at the new local interest bulletin board recently erected outside the visitors' center at Manassas National Battlefield Park on Saturday.

## Stone memorializes orator's son "VA"

By JIM ROGERS  
of the Potomac News 3/5/90

**MANASSAS NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PARK** — It is hard to believe that thousands of men died in this pastoral setting, one of the most beautiful spots in the commonwealth. The death of one of the 4,096 men who lost their lives at the Second Battle of Manassas is commemorated by a large granite boulder atop a red sandstone base called Chinn Ridge.

The stone memorializes Fletcher Webster, the only son of Daniel Webster, the famous New England orator and statesman. The younger Webster was struck down by Confederate gunfire during the third day of fighting at Second Manassas in the summer of 1862.

A weathered bronze plaque affixed to the stone reads:

"In memory of Colonel Fletcher Webster who here fell August 30, 1862, while gallantly leading his regiments, the 12th Mass. Volunteers. This memorial was dedicated Oct. 21, 1914, by survivors of his regiment and Fletcher Webster Post G.A.R. of Brockton, Mass. He gave his life for the principles laid down by his father, Daniel Webster: 'Liberty and Union now and forever, one and inseparable.' The boulder was taken from the Webster place, Marshfield, Mass."

### Places

The quotes came from a speech Daniel Webster made before the Senate in support of the Compromise of 1850. This agreement allowed some expansion of slavery into the developing Western territories. Although the elder statesman saw the compromise as a Union-saving measure, many Northerners denounced him because of his willingness to give Southerners part of what they wanted.

The younger Webster was born in Portsmouth, N.H., in 1813, a time when his father, then a Federalist in the U.S. House of Representatives, led a successful campaign to defeat proposed legislation that would have allowed the federal government to draft soldiers.

He graduated from Harvard in 1833, studied law in 1836, and later served as under secretary of state during his father's tenure as head of that department.

In 1843, Webster served with the U.S. legation in China. Two years later, he was appointed as surveyor of the Port of Boston, a post he held for 16 years.

In 1861, shortly after the start of the Civil War, Webster organized a regiment of volunteers to serve in the Union army. The 12th Massachusetts Regiment, as the light infantry unit came to be

known, marched into service on June 14, 1861, with 47-year-old Fletcher Webster as its colonel.

In the late afternoon of Aug. 30, 1862, at the Second Battle of Manassas, the 12th was hurriedly sent to defend Chinn Ridge against the advancing Confederate forces led by Lt. Gen. James "Old Pete" Longstreet.

Confederate bullets tore into Webster's arm and chest as he led his men in a desperate effort to retake a cannon battery on the ridge.

T.P. Hauilland, Webster's assistant, and several other Union soldiers were taken prisoner as they attempted to move their wounded colonel to safety.

Although left lying fatally wounded on the ground, Webster apparently lived for some time because several passing Confederate soldiers reported giving aid to him. One of them, Pvt. Ludwell Hutchinson of the 8th Virginia Infantry, played a key role in later helping pinpoint the spot where Webster lost his life.

Webster's last request to Hutchinson was to see to it that his wallet got returned to his family. After the war, Hutchinson complied with the dead soldier's request.

On the eve of his death, Webster wrote a letter to his wife:

"If a fight comes off, it will be to-day or to-morrow & will be a most dreadful &



By Jennifer Brown-Potomac News

### Boulder honors Daniel Webster's son

decisive one," he wrote. "Both sides are preparing, some three hundred thousand men are on the eve of conflict ... This may be my last letter, dear love: for I shall not spare myself ..."

To get to Chinn Ridge, take Va. 234, or Sudley Road as it also is known, through Manassas toward Interstate 66. The entrance to Chinn Ridge is on the left about a quarter mile past the I-66-Va. 234 interchange. Look for a very small sign on the left of Sudley Road near the entrance to Chinn Ridge.

*Historic Site File: Manassas National Battlefield Park Info Ctr.*

**BULL RUN REG LIB**