

# Making the Past More Present

## Hollywood Movie at Manassas Adds Drama to Battlefield

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Outside the visitors center at Manassas National Battlefield Park is a gentle rise where the widow Judith Henry's house once stood, the place where she died in her bed in a crossfire of Union and Confederate bullets.

There is nothing to see now.

But inside the visitors center, the house is recreated and the woman revived—along with the dangerous urgency of war—in a new Hollywood-produced film. The \$600,000 movie, "Manassas: End of Innocence," was made by the associate producer of the 1989 commercial Civil War movie "Glory" and turned park employees into actors to tell about the two battles of Manassas.

Most park visitors don't know much about the war, said park superintendent Robert K. Sutton, who played a Union amputee in the film. But once they see this movie, they make powerful connections with the exhibits and the battlefield.

Here and across the country, battlefields, museums and historic villages are moving beyond standstill exhibits to engage their visitors in history as if they were living it—with movies, role-playing and reenactments. In the contest for tourists' attention, site directors say the key is giving them the higher-energy information they're accustomed to now.

"We have to compete for visitors' time," said Terry Davis, director of the American Association for State and Local History in Nashville. "There are a lot of for-profit entertainment venues such as theme parks. ... We have to jazz it up to remain competitive. ... If historical sites don't change, they will be left behind."

At Mount Vernon, home of George Washington, special events director Missy Groppe said the most popular new program is one created for children, "Hands-On History."

"Children can crawl into a Revolutionary War soldier's tent, lie on his bed and handle his cooking equipment," she said. "It's very popular and sometimes we have to give out numbers and ask people to come back later."

Farther afield, at the Strawberry Bank Museum in Portsmouth, N.H., a 10-acre neighborhood that

dates to the 1600s and became a tourist attraction in 1965, visitors sit at Mrs. Shapiro's kitchen table as she makes dinner and gossips about the doings of her neighbors, Russian immigrants like herself in the 1920s.

Five other houses on the site date to five other eras, and all of them once operated on the look-don't-touch policy. But a 1995 survey showed that nearby residents who visited didn't come back and many didn't visit at all, museum President Kathleen Siso Mullins said. Now they tell friends to go see Mrs. Shapiro.

"Visitors get caught right up with her," Mullins said.

At Corner Prairie, a living history museum in Indianapolis, visitors become the actors, assuming the roles of escaping slaves on the Underground Railroad, in a drama called "Follow the North Star."

"They tell us it is a transforming experience," President John Herbst said. "For white people, it may be the first time they have experienced discrimination ... and for African American young people, they feel they have reclaimed a lesson."

Pamplin Historical Park and the National Museum of the Civil War Soldier, a privately run site near Petersburg, Va., created "Trial by Fire," in which visitors become soldiers facing the fire.

"There is a video screen where the enemy is shooting at you while hidden tubes send bursts of air around your head as though bullets are flying by," said spokesman Richard Lewis. "Everyone wears headphones where you hear the rumble of battle, horses galloping by, officers shouting commands and the prayers of the soldier standing next to you."

He said kids love it.

The reviews are just beginning to come in on the new film at Manassas, as some visitors have gotten a sneak preview before its official opening Saturday.

Centerville resident Ken Weinzaufel, 60, a consultant who works for the U.S. Navy, saw the movie Friday and called it "fabulous."

"It was well produced ... and the individual stories made it very personal," he said.

A friend of his visiting from Merrimack, N.H., Don Dempster, 61, a retired field service engineer for the federal government, said he en-

joyed it "because it was filmed right here and all around here. I want to see John Wayne action-type movie, but it was action oriented and it was artfully done."

Originally, Sutton had enough money, \$750,000, to put together a simple exhibit and rudimentary movie and decided to spend it all on a better exhibit instead. But having won the Park Service bid to write the script, Hollywood's Ray Herbert Jr. wanted to make it into a first-rate film.

As Herbert lined up four-time Academy Award winner Ben Burtt to direct it and actor Richard Dreyfuss to narrate it, Sutton sought help from Eastern National, an association that provides educational products and services in national parks and manages the battlefield's bookstore. Eastern National found a private investor to advance the money, which is expected to be recouped in five years through ticket sales—\$3, on top of the park's \$3 general admission.

Sutton also hopes to share the wealth indirectly.

"What we think will happen is the visitors will stay longer," he said. "We did a survey in 1995, and we know they stayed then an average of 90 minutes. If they watch the 45-minute movie, the average may go up to three hours. If they stay that long, they will probably eat lunch somewhere nearby, and they might stay overnight."



Manassas National Battlefield Park superintendent Robert K. Sutton shows off a reproduction of the Henry house built about two miles from the site of the original and used in the new movie about Manassas.

Joining hundreds of reenactors and park employees in the film, Sutton's 13-year-old son, Lee David, known as Buddy, played a boy who lives near the battlefield and sees the soldiers marching to battle. Later, he surveys the bodies on the field.

Buddy said playing the part was "very fun. But they did a lot of takes, sometimes 10 takes, because different people had different ideas of how it should be done."

Max Stubbs, 88, a maintenance

worker at the park, played the role of a slave wondering when freedom would come.

"I know about the Negroes back then, but it didn't bother me to play that role," said Stubbs, who brought six friends to watch his star turn. "It went well. It was my first movie. I wouldn't let them put no makeup on me. I went natural."



Sutton stands in the replica house, which was badly damaged in the making of the film. The original was destroyed in the First Battle of Manassas.

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