

# SPARE TIME

## Stone Bridge crosses history; experience it Aug. 28-29 at Manassas Battlefield

By HEIDI M. BAUMSTARK  
 Observer staff

Stones are a solid part of the Civil War. There's the Stone House on the Manassas National Battlefield Park; Stonewall Jackson was an important figure; there was even a stone battle that had soldiers throwing rocks at each other on Aug. 30, 1862, which was part of the Second Battle of Manassas.

There's the Stone Bridge that hovers over the waters of Bull Run. Its twin arches even grace the masthead of this newspaper, the Bull Run Observer. What is so special about this historic bridge?

The old Stone Bridge sits near Lee Highway as drivers head south on U.S. 29, entering Gainesville from Fairfax County. This stone bridge was built in the 1880s. It was originally built in 1825 by the Fauquier and Alexandria Turnpike Company to continue Warrenton Turnpike (U.S. 29) over the stream called Bull Run. The twin-arch, masonry span was constructed of locally quarried sandstone and served turnpike traffic until the

Civil War.

The waters of Bull Run are a main tributary of Occoquan Creek. According to "Bull Run Remembers ..." by Joseph Mills Hanson, the first record of this stream was made by Captain John Smith. His records indicate that, in 1608, he visited the King's House of the Dogue Indians on an Indian village, which was on an island at the mouth of the Occoquan.

By 1860, Prince William County had become a peaceful, farming land. Just a year later, when the first major land battle of the Civil War broke out in Manassas on July 21, 1861, thousands of marching feet trampled over the old fields and splashed through Bull Run. "Miles of trenches and fortifications came into existence along its banks in preparation for the great battles to come," Hanson wrote. During the 1861-1865 Civil War, two major battles and several skirmishes occurred beside this stream and "its waters echoed the sound of guns."

According to Jim Burgess, museum specialist at the Manassas



The Stone Bridge on U.S. 29 sits within the boundaries of the Manassas National Battlefield Park.  
 Heidi M. Baumstark / the Bull Run Observer

National Battlefield Park, the opening shots of the First Battle of Manassas "were fired by a Federal

30-pounder Parrott rifle in the vicinity of the Stone Bridge at dawn on July 21, 1861. This was part of a

demonstration to divert Confederate attention away from the main Union column, crossing Bull Run upstream at Sudley Ford."

The structure survived that first battle; however, eight months later, it was blown up. The bridge came tumbling down on March 9, 1862, when Capt. Edward Porter Alexander, a Confederate engineer officer, blew it up as the Confederate army withdrew from the area.

Burgess shed more light on why the Confederates evacuated the area. Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, Confederate commander of the Potomac District, knew a Union general was "planning a new spring offensive against Richmond with his numerically superior Army of the Potomac. Northern newspapers were full of such stories. Johnston could not continue to cover a wide front with his limited resources, so he was forced to sacrifice northern Virginia and consolidate his lines south of the Rappahannock River to better protect Richmond."

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## Step back in time Aug. 28-29 at battlefield

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Since Johnston knew Union forces would soon occupy the area, he worked to destroy anything that would profit the Yankees. "Therefore, Manassas Junction [today, called Manassas] was left in ruins, meat at Chapman's Mill [Chapman/Beverly Mill] in Thoroughfare Gap was torched to prevent it from being carried off by Union soldiers and the heavy guns that could not be moved from the batteries along the Potomac [River] were permanently disabled. The turnpike bridge over Bull Run was blown sky high," Burgess explained.

Alexander is not very specific in his memoirs as to how he blew up the bridge. Burgess said Alexander "probably mined the bridge by placing heavy charges of gunpowder at strategically vulnerable points and then lighting a long fuse. Alexander was a West Point-trained engineer so he would know the weak points in the construction of the bridge," Burgess explained.

Before Alexander blew up the bridge in March 1862, his name appeared in the history books regarding the area near the Stone Bridge. He was the first to use the wig-wag flagging system, a successful communication effort in combat, during the First Battle of Manassas. Early Sunday morning, July 21, 1861, near Stone Bridge, Alexander signaled a vital message to Confederate Col. Nathan Evans.

Alexander noticed a large Union column approaching Sudley Springs. Alexander signaled a warning for Evans that this Union column was attempting to turn his left flank. His signal was, "Look out for your left; you are turned," according to the monument inscription at Signal Hill. This information allowed Evans to intercept the Union column, which bought time for Confederate reinforcements to defeat the North.

After the bridge was blown up in March 1862, federal engineers erected a wooden bridge at the site. Burgess stated, "After the last of Gen. Pope's Union army retreated across this bridge on the night of Aug. 30, 1862, after being defeated by the Confederates in the Second Battle of Manassas, it was destroyed yet again," this time by the Union rear guard.

The Stone Bridge was completely rebuilt, presumably with remaining stonework, Burgess noted; by 1884, it was open to traffic. It was used until 1926 when a "new bridge for the realigned 'Lee Highway' [U.S. 29] opened downstream," according to "Prince William: A Past to Preserve."

In 1959, the U.S. National Park Service acquired the bridge from the Virginia Department of Trans-

portation and initiated a rehabilitation project in 1961. It is within the Manassas National Battlefield Park boundaries as a prominent landmark, signifying the importance of troop movement along the bridge.

Today, Bull Run continues to flow through Prince William and Fairfax counties, from the Bull Run Mountains to the Potomac, but offers no clue of the turmoil along its banks during the War Between the States.

Manassas National Battlefield Park will observe the 148th anniversary of the Second Battle of Manas-

sas Aug. 28-30, 1862 on the weekend of Aug. 28-29 from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Ranger-guided tours will be offered, covering different parts of the battlefield.

Living history program and demonstrations, including infantry, artillery and cavalry, will be held at the Brawner Farm, which is now open daily. Visitors should first go to the Manassas National Battlefield Park's Henry Hill Visitor Center at 6511 Sudley Road in Manassas. The park's phone number is 703-361-1339; and its website is [www.nps.gov/mana/home.htm](http://www.nps.gov/mana/home.htm).

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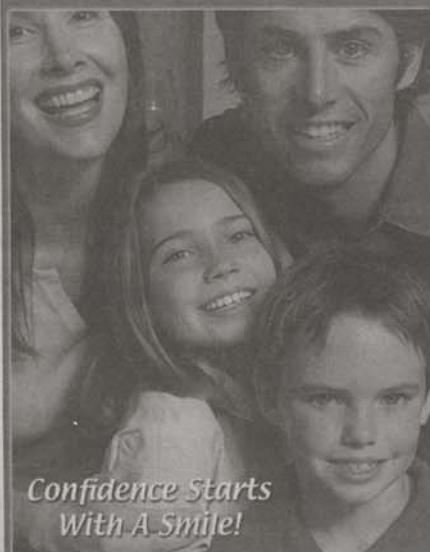
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