

PWC - Davis Tract - [Battlefield]

DATE: 11-25-2000

Potomac News

HISTORIC SITE FILE: *Manassas Natl*
PRINCE WILLIAM PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM *Battlefield Park*
RELIC/Bull Run Reg Lib *Manassas, VA*

FOR THE RECORD

Civil War Preservation Trust to announce acquisition of 136 acres near battlefield

* The Civil War Preservation Trust on Tuesday will announce its acquisition of 136 acres near the Manassas National Battlefield Park.

The property, known as the Davis Tract, was the scene of intense fighting on Aug. 29, 1862, during the Battle of Second Bull Run.

Trust president James Lighthizer, park Superintendent Robert Sutton and Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Director David Brickley will speak at the event, planned for 10 a.m. in an oak grove near the park's renovated visitor center.

In case of bad weather, the announcement will be made in the visitor center theater.

They will give a brief history of the site, describe recent preservation victories around the battlefield and recognize members of the trust, the National Park Service and local civic groups who worked on the purchase.

The Civil War Preservation Trust, with 35,000 members, is the largest nonprofit battlefield preservation organization in the United States. Its goal is to preserve the nation's endangered Civil War sites and to promote the appreciation of the grounds through education and heritage tourism.

— Media General News Service

TE: 11-25-2000

Potomac News

GOVERNMENT BRIEFS

Prince William County supervisors to discuss planning with School Board *

The Prince William Board of County Supervisors will meet with members of the county school board at 6 p.m. Monday at the Forest Greens Golf Club in Triangle.

The agenda includes planning issues, new high school sites, legislative priorities, redistricting and coordination between the county and school planning offices.

Fire and Rescue Association will meet Wednesday

The Prince William Fire and Rescue Association Board of Directors will meet Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. to discuss the site selection study for the proposed Prince William Commons fire station.

The meeting will be held at the McCoart Administration Center.

County supervisors requested that the association study the site of the station which would be part of the Dale City Volunteer Fire Department.

The study will include traffic and financial issues affecting the station which would be build on the Prince William Parkway near its intersection with Smoketown Road.

— Alfred M. Biddlecomb

PWC - Davis Tract - [Battlefield]

Va. Battleground Saved for Posterity And for Neighbors

By Chris L. Jenkins
Washington Post Staff Writer
Tuesday, November 28, 2000; Page B05

HISTORIC SITE FILE: Manassas Nat. Battlefield Park
PRINCE WILLIAM PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM
RELIC/Bull Run Reg Lib Manassas, VA

Hoping to prevent a third battle of Manassas that could pit builders against preservationists, a coalition of Civil War activists and Prince William County homeowners has secured a large tract of land adjacent to the Manassas National Battlefield Park to protect it from development.

The 136 acres, known as the Davis Tract, were bought last week for nearly \$650,000 by the Civil War Preservation Trust and the Sudley Mountain/Stony Ridge Civic Association. Today, officials from the National Park Service and the coalition will announce the acquisition at the site where the North and South tested their might nearly 140 years ago. The Park Service is the ultimate intended beneficiary of the acquisition, but the service must go through a formal process to increase the battlefield's boundaries.

"This is such an important acquisition, because we were proactive and got the land before anyone was seriously looking at it," said Jim Lighthizer, director of the Civil War Preservation Trust, a group formed several years ago to fight Walt Disney Co. plans to build a theme park near Haymarket. "Usually, we're scrambling around to raise money while there are bulldozers at the door."

For the preserve's neighbors, who live in several secluded subdivisions, the 136 acres were a symbol of potential future battles more than Civil War reverence. Fearing that the land would be bought by a developer who could build houses or strip malls, the civic association decided in late February to help buy the land. In less than six months, members raised \$130,000, with several homeowners saying they would take out second mortgages if necessary.

"I know what can happen to open space when developers start to eye them," said neighbor Greg Gorham, who first inquired about the property when he was looking at homes in the area several years ago. "And I thought that this was the only way we could actually do something to keep this property from slipping away from us."

Officials of the Preservation Trust, who were about \$150,000 short of the land's purchase price, were amazed when they heard of the homeowners' plans. "I've never seen anything like this before," Lighthizer said. "We've been totally amazed by what these homeowners have been able to do."

The densely wooded swath just west of the park is thought to be the site of the Second Battle of Manassas, where in the late afternoon of Aug. 29, 1862, Union forces briefly broke through the Confederate lines lead by Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson. Because of the estimated 2,000 men wounded and killed during the assault, local historians and preservationists have said that the plot was the most important piece of unprotected land remaining from the two battles of Manassas.

"There's a good chance that men shed blood on the land," said John Hennessy, assistant superintendent of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park and author of a book on the Second Battle of Manassas. "The land really is a great gift to people from all over who have an interest in Civil War history."

It was with relief that I turned the car around and was driving back toward the highway when a roughly dressed man stepped into the dirt road and stopped us. I kept the car in gear and rolled down a window.

"Who're you?" he demanded in a most unfriendly manner. "This is a private road. What're ya doin' here?"

"I was passing by on the highway and saw the flames up on the hill," I said. "It looked like a house might be on fire, and I thought somebody might need some help."

The man just stood there, glaring at me in the gloom, so I rolled up the window and drove off. And I wondered what I might have gotten my wife and myself into.

Jeannie and I discussed it as we drove on home.

What if I'd blundered us into a moonshine still or a covert laboratory for manufacturing illegal drugs?

What if I'd interrupted some sort of secret satanic cult ritual in full fiery progress?

Or a guy burning his house down to cover up the murder of his family?

The "what ifs" mounted. Once the mind gets going along that track, the possibilities - in the manner of horror-story novelists Stephen King and Dean Koontz - are endless.

Did that angry man in King George County, so to speak, "forgive us our trespasses" on his property?

Or did he understand that, if a house really had been on fire, we might have been trying to help his wife and children, despite the private nature of his narrow, winding dirt road through the woods?

However, we live in an increasingly litigious and suspicious society. People reflexively involve police in inconsequential matters. Trial dockets are backlogged with lawsuits years from the courtroom. Lawyers stay busy, and there are so many of them.

The statutes we must obey are super-prolific, with more being added all the time by Congress, the Virginia General Assembly and our County Board, not to mention rules promulgated by government regulatory agencies. Court decisions increase the burden.

All that might force us to think twice before rushing to someone's rescue.

Or compel us to avoid a lawsuit by risking a baseball bat or two.

Probably not, though.

Either way these days, we're solidly stuck in a "gotcha" world - damned if we do, and damned if we don't.

Bill Kling, former national political correspondent for the Chicago Tribune and The Washington Times, lives in Coles Magisterial District and was chairman of the Prince William County

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Report: County preparing

for West Nile in 2001

PW County supervisors to discuss West Nile virus

Although mosquito-borne virus hasn't hit PW,

it's 'very likely.'

By TARA SLATE DONALDSON Journal staff writer

The deadly mosquito-borne West Nile Virus is "very likely" to show up in Prince William birds next summer, according to a report by county officials.

The report from Health Director Jared Florance and Public Works Director Robert Wilson will be presented today to the Board of County Supervisors during a work session on mosquito control.

"It is expected that West Nile Virus will be found in our resident bird population in the spring or summer of 2001," the report states. "Mosquito sampling will begin at that time to monitor the spread of the virus to resident mosquito pools. Many unknowns about how the virus is spread will make initial controls difficult."

West Nile Virus, a form of encephalitis, or brain inflammation, is transmitted from birds to humans through mosquitoes. Although the disease causes only flu-like symptoms and no long-term damage in most people, the elderly and those with weak immune systems often suffer more severe reactions.

The virus was diagnosed in 62 people - seven of whom died - around New York City in the summer of 1999.

This year, 17 people have been diagnosed and an 82-year-old New Jersey man died of the disease in September.

Since its initial outbreak in New York last year, West Nile Virus has spread up and down the East Coast, and has shown up in crows in Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, D.C.

Public works spokeswoman Deb Oliver said Monday that although no infected birds have been found in Prince William, it is "inevitable" that the disease will surface here.

"It may just be that they haven't detected it," she said. "Obviously, we're pleasantly surprised that it didn't show up, but it's a cautious celebration because obviously it's all around us."

In October, dead crows infected with the West Nile Virus were found in Alexandria and Fairfax County. Birds also have tested positive in Farmville, Hampton and Spotsylvania County, as well as Washington, D.C., and Montgomery and Prince George's counties in Maryland, said Earl Tester, environmental health supervisor with the state's Prince William Health District.

The Manassas National Battlefield Park rolls through a 5,100-acre preserve just north of Manassas and commemorates two pivotal Civil War battles in which Union and Confederate forces sustained 27,000 casualties. But local residents have been more concerned about the battles fought over the land since the Civil War. Other preservationists and homeowners came to the park's defense several years ago when Disney sought to build a history theme park within a regiment's width of the preserve.

"Maybe this will show people that they don't have to be some big developer . . . to acquire land and do what they want with land that's near them," Gorham said. "This is important historical land, but I've seen how important open space is to these communities as well."

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Manassas Journal Messenger

HISTORIC SITE FILE: Manassas Nat. Battlefield
PRINCE WILLIAM PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM
RELIC/Bull Run Reg Lib Manassas, VA Park

Preservationists protect battlefield Victory against urban sprawl saves historic 136 acre-tract

After the announcement of the purchase of 136 acres surrounding Manassas National Battlefield Park, members of the Civil War Preservation Trust and the Department of Conservation and Trust check out one of the cannons.

HELENE STERNBERG
MEDIA GENERAL NEWS SERVICE

By PATRICK WILSON
MEDIA GENERAL NEWS SERVICE

■ MANASSAS

As he made plans in 1998 to buy land and build a home north of Manassas National Battlefield Park, Greg Gorham was exploring the area and noticed a sign in the weeds. It advertised land for sale, about 143 acres or so.

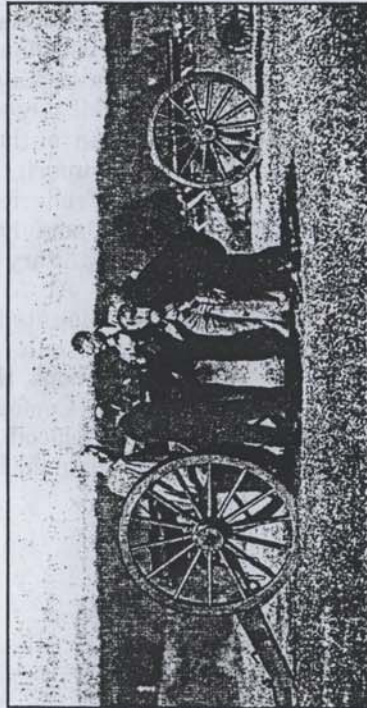
Gorham, a 41-year-old software analyst, called Weber &

Associates Realty, which posted the sign.

He learned that a Prince William judge in 1996 had put local attorneys in charge of selling the property at the best price they could. The profits would be divided up between heirs who had claim to the property.

Gorham called Robert K. Sutton, superintendent of

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Manassas Journal Messenger

▲ BATTLEFIELD

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Manassas National Battlefield Park, to see if the National Park Service could acquire the land and protect it from being developed.

But because the tract is not inside the park's boundaries, there wasn't much the National Park Service could do, Sutton told him.

Sutton suggested Gorham contact the Civil War Preservation Trust and other groups, which Gorham did.

That ultimately led to the purchase of the land Nov. 17, with \$630,000 from state and federal funds, money raised by the Sudley Mountain/Stony Ridge Civic Association and money from the preservation trust, a national organization devoted to preserving endangered Civil War battlefields.

Preservationists, local residents, and government officials held a ceremony Tuesday at the battlefield's Henry Hill visitor center to announce details of the purchase and hail it as a victory against suburban sprawl.

James Lighthizer, presi-

dent of the Civil War Preservation Trust, called the purchase "the saving of an extremely important piece of Civil War battlefield ground."

The size of the land, known as the Davis property, ended up totaling 136 acres. It is located west of Featherbed Lane on the park's west end, and was the site of bloodshed during the August 1862 Battle of Second Manassas.

The trust reports that it has saved nearly 11,000 acres of land at battlefields nationwide.

When Gorham first called the National Park Service and then the preservation trust about the land, Lighthizer took it seriously.

"He didn't have any money, but had a great idea," Lighthizer said.

Before long, local residents helped come up with funds. Gorham, Jack Hermansen, Claude "Brad" Bradshaw and other members of the civic association began raising funds, with serious effort beginning about a month and a half ago. Bradshaw is the fund-raiser.

They have lined up \$80,000 of the \$130,000 they committed to raise for the trust,

Who's paying for the Davis tract:

Civil War Preservation
Trust treasury: \$200,000

State and federal preser-
vation money: \$200,000

Sudley Mountain/Stony
Ridge Civic Association:
\$130,000

Civil War Preservation
Trust fund raising:
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Total: \$630,000

Source: Civil War Preservation

which collects all donations.

The land has always been privately owned, Sutton said. Park Service officials did not know much about it until recently, he said.

Aug. 29, 1862, was the first full day of fighting during the three-day Battle of Second Manassas.

Union troops had been attacking Confederate lines all day, said John Hennessy, an author and the assistant superintendent of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park.

At 5 p.m., Union troops mounted their largest assault, with 2,500 to 2,700 troops, Hennessy said.

Confederate troops began to yield off of a rocky knoll and onto the land that later became

known as the Davis property. Fighting climaxed when a fresh wave of Confederate forces washed over the property and drove the Yankees back, Hennessy said.

The ultimate goal of the preservationists is to turn the land over to the National Park Service and make it part of Manassas National Battlefield Park.

Even without purchase by the preservation trust, the land might have gone undisturbed, Gorham said. But it just as easily could have been developed, he said.

"We're not done with this until the park has it in their boundaries, protected," he said.

• Patrick Wilson is a staff writer with the Potomac News in Woodbridge

Preserving a part of history

Resident starts process to save battlefield land

By PATRICK WILSON
Staff Writer

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He learned that a Prince William judge in 1996 had put local attorneys in charge of selling the property at the best price they could. The profits would be divided up between heirs who had claim to the property.

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But because the tract is not inside the park's boundaries, there wasn't much the National Park Service could do, Sutton told him.

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Helene Steinberg—Staff Photographer

After the announcement of the purchase of 136 acres bordering Manassas National Battlefield Park, members of the Civil War Preservation Trust and other preservation officials check out one of the cannons.

The size of the land, known as the Davis property, ended up totaling 136 acres. It is located west of Featherbed Lane on the park's west end, and was the site of bloodshed during the August 1862 Battle of Second Manassas.

"This 136 acres will be part of about 2,000 acres that our group is going to save at battlefields this year," Lighthizer said. The trust reports that it has saved nearly 11,000 acres of land at battlefields nationwide. When Gorham first called the National Park Service and then the preservation trust about the land,

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Manassas Nat'l

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Preserving a piece of history

HISTORY From Page A1



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