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Bull Run Observer

Lights, cameras, action

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Observer staff

There is a new "must see" movie in town. And it's only \$3 a head with children under 17 free. The movie is "*Manassas: End of Innocence*," and is currently playing at the newly refurbished theater in the Manassas National Battlefield Park's Henry Hill Visitor Center. The film runs for 45 minutes and is shown every hour on the hour from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. During the fall and winter months, the visitor center opens at 8:30 a.m. and closes at 5 p.m.

Local residents will quickly recognize many local landmarks such as Gainesville Methodist Church and the Manassas Presbyterian Church. Most of the filming took place in Manassas National Battlefield Park where you will recognize such places as the Stone House, the Stone Bridge and Bull

Run. And there are some Bull Run area people in the film as well. Some residents may have witnessed the filming of the movie in July, 2001, especially at Gainesville United Methodist Church where crews went on location for a scene in the film, called a "docu-drama."

The movie depicts the actions of the two battles fought on the grounds of what is now the Manassas National Battlefield Park. The first battle was fought in July 1861, and the second was fought in August 1862.

The movie also details the stories of some of the ordinary soldiers. The poignant story of 17-year-old Charles Norris, a Virginia Military Institute student, who was killed as he led his company into the battle, really drives home the point that war is hell. The following day his older brother found his body and took him home to Leesburg.

"Norris's fate was a poignant reminder that the Civil War really was the end of innocence for America," according to Manassas National Battlefield Park Superintendent Robert K. Sutton.

Sutton added, "But Norris's story did not end there. His family kept the VMI coat that he wore when he was killed. The family loaned the coat to the park, and it is currently on display in the visitor center museum. So now our visitors can watch Norris's story unfold on the screen, then walk a few feet into the museum and see the actual coat he wore when he was killed."

the impact of the battles on the local residents such as Judith Henry, an 85-year-old nearly blind widow, who was killed when her home, the Henry House, was destroyed in the crossfire of the battle of Henry Hill. When was the last time you saw a film and were able to walk a few steps out of the theater and be on the grounds where the story of the film took place?

Academy Award winning actor Richard Dreyfuss narrates the film.

Sutton said, "I understand that Mr. Dreyfuss considered a profession as a history teacher when he was young. His understanding of American history and his enormous talent add a depth to the stories of Manassas that are truly extraordinary."

Four-time Academy Award winner Ben Burt directed the film. He is a legend in the film industry for his sound effects design for the Star Wars and Indiana Jones trilogies. Burt directed and edited "*Manassas*" concurrently with editing and designing the sound effects for "*Star Wars Episode II: The Attack of the Clones*."

Burt said, "'*Manassas: End of Innocence*' was photographed in the new High Definition Sony Digital Image format, which gives it a clarity and color reproduction better than a theatrical movie. Add to that the five-channel surround sound and a sub-bass that will shake the theater each time a cannon fires, and you have an experience rarely seen and heard at a National Park Service venue."

The movie was written and produced by Ray Herbeck Jr. Herbeck was the associate producer for the

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Academy Award-winning film "Glory" and wrote the documentary "The True Story of Glory Continues," which accompanied that film.

Herbeck recently said, "It has been said that filmmaking is 'the collaborative art.' Our experience on 'Manassas: End of Innocence' proves the point. My crew of filmmakers, Bob Sutton's park staff and our cast of 200 re-enactors together pulled off a miracle, a beautiful film that looks like a million bucks-but at a cost that was much less. Sometimes I think even the heroes who struggled here 'channeled' through as we tried to do their story justice."

Sutton, his wife Harriet

Davison, and son Buddy are seen in the film. Buddy Sutton and Anna Cucurullo, the daughter of Assistant Superintendent Karen Cucurullo, are shown in many scenes portraying the son and daughter of local residents. In addition, about ten other park staffers are seen in the film.

The reactions of visitors have been overwhelmingly positive. I can attest to that as I have seen the film three times and will probably return many times with my family, as my great-grandfather, Union Army Pvt. Joseph Whitmore, participated in both of the battles fought at Manassas National Battlefield Park as did at least two of my distant cousins who fought for the Confederacy.

Eastern National, the park's

partner and cooperating association, sponsored the production of the film. Eastern has for many years managed the park's bookstore and has collaborated on a number of other park projects.

"Manassas is exceedingly fortunate to have Eastern National as its partner," according to Sutton. "Without its help, this film would not have become a reality."

The Henry Hill Visitor Center at Manassas National Battlefield Park is located on Sudley Road, immediately north of the Northern Virginia Community College's Manassas Campus.

If you have any questions about the film or the park, call the Henry Hill Visitor Center at 703-361-1339.