

Manassas Battle Not Over

By Jim Roberts

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MANASSAS — Property rights, money and that pervasive Southern reverence for Civil War heritage have combined to throw the Manassas National Battlefield Park into another fierce struggle over its future.

For at least 20 years, battlefield defenders and other Civil War buffs have fought to protect the site from such perceived encroachments as an interstate highway, a national cemetery and a \$75 million amusement park.

But now, the defenders are on the offensive, seeking to extend the boundaries of the park. Their actions are being viewed by some as encroachments on the rights of other Prince William County residents.

PRESERVATION AND CIVIL WAR INTERESTS — With the aid of Rep. Herbert E. Harris II, D-8th, urging the passage of a bill that would expand the park by about 1,800 acres. The desired land, they say, is crucial to the interpretation of the two battles fought near Manassas or necessary as a buffer from outside development.

"This is a precious piece of soil," Harris said last week.

Prince William County, Harris aide Jack Sweeney said, is one of the fastest growing localities in the state. From 1970 to 1976, its population increased 37.8 percent, placing it fifth in the state.

With Interstate 66, which borders the battlefield, set for extension into Washington, growth may sprawl into the predominantly rural area around the park.

"That area is very prone to development," Sweeney said. "There's no doubt that it's going to be developed."

SEVERAL TRACTS near the interstate are commercially zoned, and proponents of the so-called Harris bill know of the commercial nature of the Gettysburg National Military Park area in Pennsylvania and the looming observation tower that sprouted near the historic zone.

Opponents of Harris' Manassas legislation generally perceive it as a threat to homeowners in the battlefield area and to the county's economic development plans, which look toward areas south of the park along I-66 for industrial and commercial growth.

While none of the expansion opponents is against historical preservation, some at least think the current boundaries are sufficient to honor the soldiers who died near Bull Run.

"OUR FEELING," said Alice E. Humphries, chairman of the Prince William County Board of Supervisors, which adamantly opposes expansion, "was that the battlefield is primarily a facility for historians. It is not an active-pursuit facility. It's for those who want to commemorate the war dead of the Civil War, and the facilities and land area there are adequate [for that]."

Supervisor James Byrd added, "We have to live in the present and future. We've got to forget about the past. We've honored those people... and those people out there are happy."

If the Harris bill is passed by the Senate — it easily passed in the House this year — the National Park Service will be permitted to acquire several tracts on all sides of the battlefield.

OF GREATEST HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE are the Stone Bridge and the Brawner Farm tract, where on Aug. 29, 1862, Lt. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson fought to prevent a concentration of Union troops under Maj. Gen. John Pope.

What makes the Brawner Farm land especially attractive is the fact that the property has changed little in the more than 100 years since Lee's surrender at Appomattox. "It's a beautifully preserved piece of land," said Francis F. Wilshin, former park superintendent at Manassas who lives in Fredericksburg. "Its undeveloped — almost a dead ringer for what it was during the battle."

An area known as Gibbons Woods lies on the Brawner tract, and its trees are full of bullets and shell

fragments. While other nearby woods were logged over the years, Gibbons Woods remained untouched, Wilshin said, because loggers feared the shrapnel would damage their saws.

AS MOST CIVIL WAR BUFFS know, the Stone Bridge is the site where the first shots were fired in the First Battle of Manassas, marking the first major engagement between Union and Confederate troops after the Fort Sumter, S.C., attack.

At the bridge, a small Union force sought to distract the Confederates while the bulk of the army under Maj. Gen. Irvin McDowell made a flanking movement to the north.

McDowell's march was slow, allowing the Confederates time to realize that the Stone Bridge attack was a diversion and move to meet the Union troops. Confederate Gen. Pierre G.T. Beauregard, with valuable reinforcements under Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, went on to defeat the Federals.

Jackson, a brigadier general in the first battle, earned his nickname during the engagement. He helped repeat that defeat a year later at the second battle of Manassas.

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THE PEOPLE IN THE COUNTY and surrounding areas don't appreciate the history of these places," Wilshin said. "It's a golden egg, and they're so willing to crack it."

Legislation to extend the park boundaries has been in Congress for about 2½ years. Harris' initial attempt was killed last year by Sen. William L. Scott, R-Va., who left a proxy vote against the expansion, procedurally removing it from consideration. Scott was in the Philippines at the time.

Harris' second bill, which excluded some properties that were in the first, while including some new tracts, had little difficulty in the House, but opposition in certain sections of the county hardened as it proceeded to the Senate.

THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS initially agreed to the bill with reservations but later issued a strong resolution of opposition. Mrs. Humphries said she didn't think nearby residents had been adequately informed about the legislation's impact and claimed that the board hadn't been told it would be introduced.

"Had the congressman just simply given it to us for informational purposes prior to being introduced, much of this controversy wouldn't have happened," she said.

The supervisors also are concerned that the park expansion would remove land from the tax rolls of a county with a rising population and burgeoning demands for public services, but with few industries to balance the tax base. About a quarter of the county is publicly owned.

BUT IN THE MIND of at least one supervisor is the fear that the Harris bill might be amended to include the more than 500 acres near the battlefield owned by the Marriott Corp. for the placement of a Great America theme park.

Some of the same groups that favor the Harris bill were instrumental in having overturned in court a rezoning that would have allowed Marriott to build there. Since the suit, Marriott has looked to Maryland for a park location, but without success.

Marriott still owns the land and hasn't completely dropped the idea of locating in Prince William County. The supervisors still want the proposed park because it could become a tax bonanza.

"I AM CONVINCED that they [proponents of the

Harris bill] are not concerned with the expansion of the park," Byrd said. "They are concerned with stopping Marriott. At the last minute, they could put an amendment on there and include the Marriott property, and I think that is their intention."

Although many preservationists would like the property included, Harris doesn't want it in because, he said, the Marriott controversy should be solved by the county through its zoning laws.

The other major source of opposition to Harris' expansion plan has come from several residents who live outside the boundaries of the proposed expansion, but fear that their land might be taken.

THE BASES FOR CONTENTION among these residents are sections of the bill that allow the park service to condemn land within the extended boundaries and also to make "minor revisions in the boundary from time to time."

Betty E. Duley, whose father lives near the park boundary, said she is certain the park service could take his land according to Harris bill provisions, if the land were deemed threatened by development.

Under the proposal, she said, "the people are at the mercy of the park... When they ask for your land, what choice do you have?"

E. Clay Hollingsworth, a homeowner in the Battlefield Community, which lies between the park and the Marriott tract, also believes the park service is given wider latitude under the Harris bill than the boundaries indicate. "The way this thing is written, that is pretty much an open door to do what they want."

HOWEVER, AN AIDE to Harris said the minor boundary change provision in the bill would not allow any substantial acquisition outside the park's boundary. "We're talking about a foot or two," he said.

The aide added that while the bill permits the park service to buy about 1,000 acres and place scenic easements (restricting development to designated use) on 750 other acres, it is not required to buy anything.

Acquisitions, he said, are intended to be on a willing seller-willing buyer basis. The condemnation clause is "housekeeping language," he said.

Fears among residents of Hollingsworth's Battlefield Community subdivision and the Stony Ridge area, where Mrs. Duley's father lives, have been heightened by the desire of the park service at one time to include both areas in the park boundaries.

ALTHOUGH THE PARK SERVICE and Interior Department, which administers the service, backed off from those extensions, Mrs. Duley isn't satisfied. "How do we know that when it goes to the full Senate, they won't throw it back in?" she asked.

Opposition to the bill, manifest in about 800 letters sent by Mrs. Duley's Concerned Citizens of Prince William County group, was successful in persuading Scott and Sen. Harry F. Byrd Jr., Ind.-Va., to request a delay in Senate consideration in an effort to resolve the differences.

Lately, however, Byrd's and Scott's offices have received much mail from Civil War round tables and other battlefield supporters who have contacted a local group known as the Save the Battlefield Committee.

ANNE SNYDER, committee chairman, said at least 8,000 people have been alerted to the difficulties encountered by the Harris bill.

Since the legislation was delayed, the Interior Department has compromised and deleted certain tracts not threatened by development, and a Harris aide said the compromises likely would be incorporated into the bill by the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. The committee is expected to consider it early next year.

The Interior department compromise seems unlikely to satisfy many of those who object to the battlefield extension. If for no other reason, months may pass before the anger subsides. Some residents feel miffed, they claim, because they were left in the dark about the bill.

As Mrs. Duley said, "I am ashamed that our representative would pull something like this."

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