



ON THE
skirmish | **line**
Newsletter of The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust

Making Sure CVBT Has a Strong Plan of Action

CVBT and Civil War Trust Coordinate Strategies • Partnerships are the key to preserving historic land. The CVBT has worked with the Civil War Trust many times, both organizations bringing resources to the table, which complement one another. Local groups on the ground can keep a close eye on land identified as important, maintain contact with property owners, and monitor the local development environment to ensure potential preservation opportunities are not lost for lack of attention. Our success from the beginning has been built on such a solid working relationship.

Liaison is ongoing, but when there is a chance for a face-to-face meeting among people with very busy schedules, we jump at the chance. Such an opportunity came in early January 2018 and the CVBT and Civil War Trust were able to sit down together to discuss plans, outline areas of interest, and consider potential opportunities. This volume of *On the Skirmish Line* touches on all of these things, which are the basic *how* and *why* of land preservation.

Any group that aspires to acquire historic land needs a well thought out plan of action. Anything less leaves the effort unfocused. A good plan identifies what land is critical to obtain, and why. In that context, land of lesser historic value can be noted, to be considered for acquisition if logical and feasible, but also able to be ignored if stronger efforts are needed elsewhere. Not all historic land can be acquired in a place like Fredericksburg, nor should it be. Our window of opportunity is too limited within this volatile real estate market, so our responsibility is to ensure we continue to buy the right land at the right price.

The CVBT Board has recently begun to review its old acquisition plans, in order to update them. As we have stated

many times, no organization can hope to protect all of the land in central Virginia upon which historic events occurred. Instead, we have had to determine which portions of the Fredericksburg area battlefields must absolutely be protected for someone to be able to visit and fully understand them. There are many places that can be acquired, places that might even have interesting stories associated with them, but not all of them materially contribute to a destination that includes the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park.

The actual battlefields in this part of the world are vast, extending for miles across a tremendous expanse of land that is already cut by highways and modern communities. As a consequence, acquisition of land has focused on what is

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The 2018 Annual Meeting Weekend

THE CVBT IS PLANNING A PACKED WEEKEND for its annual meeting, from Friday April 20 to Sunday April 22. As always, we are providing a range of tours as well as a banquet on Saturday evening, with its own compelling speaker. The theme is Beyond Spotsylvania, and the schedule is as follows:

Friday, April 20 will provide a choice of two tours, one of them a road trip, the other local.

★ The first tour takes our members into the summer of 1864, as the siege of Petersburg was beginning. A bus tour is scheduled to depart from the Hospitality House at 9:00 a.m., with Eric J. Wittenberg guiding a bus and walking tour of the events of June 7-25, 1864—Sheridan's Second Raid and the Battle of Trevilian Station. The exciting bonus is that we will visit land just recently preserved and not previously open to visitation. Lunch is included and the group will be brought back to the Hospitality House by 4:00 p.m.

★ The second tour will give members a close up view of Fredericksburg, a colonial town established in 1728 that grew into a genteel community that found itself in the path of huge armies in the 1860s. The afternoon will start with lunch at a downtown restaurant and then Scott Walker will guide the group, on foot, through neighborhoods that exhibit four centuries of occupation. The Civil War was just a few years in the community's overall history, which will become abundantly evident as the tour follows the battle action of 1862 and 1863, as well as the hospital phase of 1864, through places that are still occupied by residents and businesses. This tour will also return folks to the Hospitality House by 4:00 p.m.

Friday evening will be dinner on your own. There is an abundance of familiar restaurants nearby as well as an impressive collection of chef-owned restaurants downtown. Explore and enjoy.

Saturday, April 21 also includes a choice of a road trip or a walking tour of another part of Fredericksburg.

★ The bus/walking tour will take participants to the North Anna battlefield and the period immediately following the battles of Spotsylvania Court House. Robert E.L. Krick will lead this group, following the fighting that stretched across May 20-24. The terrain provided an advantage to the Confederates that ultimately put the Union army in grave danger. The Federal commander managed to pull back from the tenuous position, but only after fighting had exploded across three different parts of the battlefield. This tour will visit each one of them.

★ The second Fredericksburg walking tour will again be in the company of Scott Walker, following lunch at another downtown establishment. The Civil War years saw the town extensively photographed and sketched and Scott will share many of these images, which readily show how much of the old town survives. As on Friday, transportation will be provided to and from the Hospitality House.

Saturday evening will include a reception, dinner, the Annual Meeting, and a special presentation.

★ We will gather at the Hospitality House for a reception at 6:00 p.m., followed by dinner and the annual business

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After It Is Saved, Then What?

The CVBT is a lands trust. Aside from special tours for CVBT members, we do not typically open the land we have acquired to the public. That is a task for those who know how to do those things well, such as national and state resource agencies. We hold on to land only as long as necessary to pass it on to those who will care for it and make it accessible to visitors. What sometimes comes as a surprise is that while acquiring land can take years of negotiating and fund raising, getting land into the hands of a public agency and making it understandable to visitors is also a lengthy process with its own challenges.

Getting Land into Public Ownership

One problem to be overcome has been a condition imposed by a certain type of funding. In Virginia, state grants require that an easement be placed on property acquired with those funds, to be held by the funding agency. That condition is a logical one when public funds are used to preserve ground, but the National Park Service cannot purchase or receive in donation any land that is thus encumbered. The Commonwealth of Virginia has been quite generous in funding Civil War preservation, and the Civil War Trust and CVBT have been aggressive in pursuing those opportunities. The public benefit that justifies the use of public funds is the recognition that people are drawn to visit historic places, which helps to support local economies. Making the transition from saving land to effectively managing it, though, has been held up by the requirement that easements be removed before relinquish to the National Park Service.

During its 2018 session, the Virginia Assembly has enacted legislation that finally addresses this stumbling block to transferring preserved ground to National Battlefield Parks. The Commonwealth of Virginia is now able to work with the federal government to transfer certain battlefield easements. There is still much work to do in this regard, such as getting Congress to expand certain National Park boundaries, but this step in Virginia is a huge step forward.

Scene Restoration

Another issue in managing battlefield land is to return the terrain to its wartime appearance. Once CVBT acquires a property, we demolish any structures that do not relate to its historic importance. We also cap any wells as a matter of safety. After that, the next step is to address the natural cover of the site. Was it wooded? Cultivated? Both? Does it need to be screened from nearby development? All of these things need to



Before the National Park Service restored the battlefield landscape, beginning in the 1970s, places like Saunders Field remained hidden from view and defied understanding.

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be considered for the land to have any value as a historic resource.

The National Park Service has become quite adept at scene restoration, having carefully worked out a variety of techniques to reestablish the Civil War landscape. We explored how this type of work was pioneered at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania NMP in our latest volume of *Fredericksburg History and Biography*. In an

article by our own Bob Krick, called “Restoring Battlefield Scenes in 1972 and Beyond: A Memoir,” we presented the challenges, both practical and political, that eventually provide the visitor with a compelling experience when visiting a park. Again, such efforts take years to complete and shows how keeping land from being developed is only a first step. **SL**

Youth Day A Great Success



Participants in the 2017 Youth Day learn about Civil War artillery on the Fredericksburg battlefield.



Cannoneer Katie Scarbeck fires a 12-pounder Napoleon.

On a weekend in October 2017, while many of their peers slept in, a group of 20 students woke up early to brave freezing temperatures while helping to care for a local battlefield. The CVBT organizes an annual Youth Day for interested young persons who are looking for a way to serve their community. Our available tasks include much needed maintenance, to keep preserved battlefield land neat and orderly for visitors. This past Fall, that meant clearing and expanding drainage ditches, picking up litter, and cutting down heavy brush which had grown up in several stormwater retaining ponds.

Providing key support were the re-enactors of the 47th Virginia, which brought much-needed chainsaws to the work site. In addition to an opportunity for hard work, we want our students to gain some historic insight about the land they are helping to maintain. To this end, the 47th recounted the dramatic events of December 13, 1862 and Major John Pelham's activity on the corner protected by CVBT. When asked why they had decided to come out students cited the importance of preserving American battlefields. Boy Scout Xavier Gonzalez stated: "It's what makes us who we are and

it's important to know where we've come from in order to move on into the future."

After several hours of very heavy work, the students were able to participate in an artillery demonstration, courtesy of Stribling's Battery. Portraying the 1st Connecticut Light Artillery Battery for the day, reenactors talked to the students about how the young men manning the guns were probably not that different from themselves. Matthew Devor observed afterwards: "War is a terrible thing, war is a godawful thing that should be avoided, but the fact is they did remarkable feats during these battles, during these marches."

Riverbend High School Senior, Katie Scarbeck, was surprised to be given the task of actually firing the cannon. After pulling the firing lanyard like a seasoned veteran, Katie later commented: "I learned a lot about artillery and about the dangers that come with the job and how the men who used to do this, how brave they were to do it."

We are always impressed with the students who come out to help CVBT on its lands. They are smart, hard working, and thoughtful, and we are proud to know them. **SL**

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meeting. Bob Zeller will then present a tremendously innovative look at Civil War photography, in three dimensions, which he calls The Civil War in Depth. The evening promises to be a lot of fun.

Sunday, April 22 will include brunch on a portion of the Spotsylvania Court House battlefield. The area, called Stephenson's Ridge, is in private ownership, but carefully

tended by those who live there. We will have the opportunity to explore earthworks in the sector occupied by the Union Ninth Corps, which is not a part of the battlefield that receives much attention. We know that people need to travel that day, so this event will wrap up before noon.

We are very pleased with the historians who will be our tour guides and hope you will be able to join us.

Pelham's Crossing Update

In 2003, The CVBT received a donation of 11.9 acres of land on the Fredericksburg battlefield. A developer was building a residential neighborhood, but did not want to cut into an area of earthworks. We gladly took ownership of the historic land within a development that came to be called Pelham's Crossing. The area in question is the relatively flat terrain to the south and east of the main Confederate line that is anchored on Prospect Hill, within the National Park. Any rise of ground in that level landscape had a potential for tactical value and so the minor hill became fortified.

The historic events that became associated with that property actually had nothing to do with Major John Pelham or the first battle of Fredericksburg. The earthworks, after all, were dug during the winter of 1862-63, in preparation for a spring campaign rather than for the winter battle, which is clear from both Confederate and Union documents. Pelham had moved guns up to the Bowling Green Road on December 13, 1862 and effectively delayed the Federal advance for a brief period.

Confederate guns in the Pelham's Crossing earthworks would be able to do the same, but out of range of Federal artillery on the heights in Stafford County, which had made life difficult for Pelham and his gunners.

These earthworks were occupied by Captain William B. Hurt's Alabama Battery in late April and early May 1863, during the Chancellorsville campaign. That unit had guns known as Whitworth rifles, long range artillery pieces manufactured in England. There is no Confederate engineer's report that conveniently states that they built those earthworks for their two Whitworth guns, but after action reports filed after the Chancellorsville campaign make it clear that those guns were in a position to enfilade the Bowling Green Road and make it problematic for Union forces to advance to that position.

The second battle of Fredericksburg does not get much attention, but some of the CVBT's holdings certainly relate to that action and aid in an understanding of that part of the Chancellorsville campaign. SL

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needed to create a cohesive resource that tells the story of a series of battles. There has never been and never will be enough funds to buy it all.

There is another reason we must be focused and judicious. Development pressure is too great for us to get sidetracked into secondary terrain. Pursuing land of marginal historic value diverts resources from our ability to be able to acquire the important terrain. That dynamic is the harsh reality of trying to protect land in and around Fredericksburg. Some land is going to be lost to development, even as we are successful in acquiring other lands. Preserving land without that broader perspective is an exercise in irresponsibility toward those who send us donations. To avoid that pitfall, we carefully evaluate our goals on a regular basis. We must always be able to report that we are being good stewards of the cash that is donated to us to invest. Battlefield land is everywhere. Battlefield land that can be acquired and added to the National Park holdings, to advance our understanding of distant events, is what we must be sure we accomplish.

Once realistic goals are identified, the next step is to make sure we share them. A plan needs to reveal to developers and to localities exactly what we intend to pursue. Our experience is that local governments appreciate knowing what lands we seek to protect because they are generally supportive and will note those areas in their own Comprehensive Plans. Some members get nervous that expressions of interest will cause the price of the land to increase, a plan thus generating a kind of historic bump in value. The price of land is driven by market forces, though, and a group that foolishly pays a historic premium will not remain in business very long. Developers certainly do not pay a historic premium so there is no justification for us to do so.

There are more problems in not having a plan, than there are in having a good one, so CVBT is making sure we have a good one. To ask for donations without a clear delineation of goals is a disservice to our members. Having said all that, the CVBT always remains open to unplanned opportunities, and a good plan outlines the criteria the group will use to consider every potential acquisitions. SL

E-Newsletter available

The CVBT endeavors to maintain close contact with those who generously support its mission. We do this through a quarterly newsletter that is a tangible reminder in your mailbox of our regard and appreciation. Some organizations think they can save money by converting to an electronic format, but we have found that not everyone considers a lack of paper to be a convenience. Still, we give members the option of receiving their newsletters via e-mail. If you would like to change your current newsletter mailing to an electronic distribution, please contact us at comdir@cvbt.org and we will make that change for you.



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The mission of the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust is to preserve land associated with the four major campaigns of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House.

For information on membership, please write to the Trust at P.O. Box 3417, Fredericksburg, VA 22402; call our office at (540) 374-0900; or visit our website at www.cvbt.org. Contributions to the CVBT are tax-deductible.

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