

## CWPT Buys 680 Mine Run Acres At Bargain Price

By Deborah Fitts

ORANGE COUNTY, Va. — In one fell swoop, the Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT) purchased the most significant battlefield of the Mine Run Campaign in early May for \$1.4 million.

Payne's Farm, at 685 acres, represents 85 to 90 percent of the entire battlefield, according to historian Robert E.L. Krick. The battle of Payne's Farm, or New Hope Church, was the first and largest encounter of the abortive federal attack Nov. 27-Dec. 2, 1863, when forces under Gen. George Meade attempted a move through the Wilderness to hit the Confederate army south of the Rapidan River.

Krick, a historian at Richmond National Battlefield Park and an authority on the battle, said the purchase was "extremely important."

"There are very few opportunities to acquire an intact battlefield with one purchase," Krick said. When the property is eventually opened with hiking trails and interpretive signs, "It will be like unwrapping a new Christmas present for people interested in the Civil War."

The Trust is partnering in the purchase with the Warrenton-based Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC). According to Trust spokes-

man Jim Campi, the Trust and PEC approached Bill Meadows, the owner of Payne's Farm, last year.

Known as Bill "the Farmer" Meadows, Meadows owns Meadows Farms Nurseries, a chain of nurseries in the region. The two nonprofits inquired about purchasing a conservation easement on 400 acres. But Meadows went them one better: he offered to sell the entire property, which comprises rolling farmland and wooded areas.

Meadows made a "bargain sale," meaning that he sold for less than the appraised value in return for a charitable deduction.

Of the \$1.4 million purchase price, about \$1 million came from federal funds appropriated by Congress in fiscal 2002 for Civil War battlefield acquisition. Additional funding came from the federal Farmland Protection Program, which for the first time is earmarking grants to preserve productive farmland that has historical or cultural assets. The program is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, an arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

PEC is also helping in the pur-

chase with funds of its own, Campi said. The acquisition represents the first preservation of any property associated with the Mine Run Campaign.

Krick said the farm today is "almost identical" to its appearance in 1863. The battle occurred when Union forces under James French collided unexpectedly with a Confederate division under Edward Johnson. For a period in the late afternoon of Nov. 27, "Several brigades just stood still and shot at each other till they ran out of ammunition," Krick said.

Witnesses said later that "the roar of small arms was equal to anything" they heard in the ensuing fighting of the bloody Overland Campaign. Krick said the landscape, rife with small knolls and hillocks, in large measure directed the course of the action — a fact that visitors to the farm will be able to see for themselves.

The Trust will own and interpret Payne's Farm. Friends of the Fredericksburg Area Battlefields

will assist with interpretation. Campi said the site is so substantial, "It's enough to make it a real tourist destination for Civil War buffs. It's really nice property. It'll be neat for the public to get back in there."

What remained of the Payne family farmhouse and barns disappeared in the 1930s, according to Krick, and there are no historic buildings on the property.

At presstime, Assistant Agriculture Secretary Lou Gallegos was scheduled to speak at a press conference sponsored by the Trust May 10 at Payne's Farm. Campi said Gallegos "has been a champion of using this [farmland preservation] program for battlefield preservation. He wants it used to encourage heritage tourism at rural sites like this."

PEC President Christopher Miller, CWPT President Jim Lighthizer and Krick were also to take part in the press conference.

Payne's Farm is located 17 miles east of Orange on Route 611.