

Manassas Park Will Rehab Battlefield Buildings

By Deborah Fitts

MANASSAS, Va. — A little-noticed building on the Manassas battlefield is slated for major rehabilitation, which will enable the park to open it for the first time to visitors.

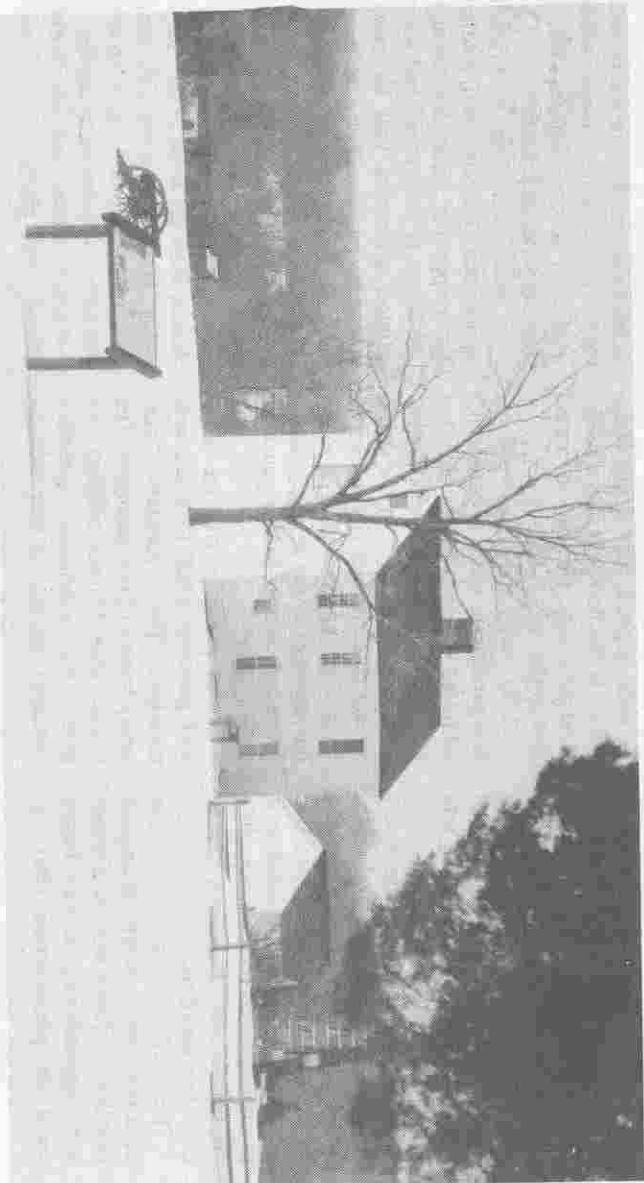
The story-and-a-half frame house on Sudley Road served after the war as the Sudley Post Office. It is now in "horrible shape — deplorable" following decades of inattention, according to Superintendent Bob Sutton.

The rehab project, which will be supported by National Park Service construction funds and is tentatively planned for next year, calls for stabilization and sufficient repair to open it to visitors during the summers. The \$1.5 million project also includes plans to convert the Henry House, a focal point of the battlefield, into a "discovery center" for school children.

of the house," he said. "They were 90 yards apart shooting at each other. The amount of lead flying back and forth was staggering. We assumed that the house was so badly damaged that they tore it down and started over."

But Sutton said a historic structures report done on the building last year indicated that part of the house could date from before the war. Features in the house typical of the early-to-mid-1800s include hewn wood, nails, and placement of the sills directly on a stone rubble foundation, he said.

Sutton acknowledged that an "internal debate" is still under way about the age of the Brawner farmhouse. If he is correct, it is one of only three structures on the park that date from the war, the others being the Thornberry House and the Stone House.



The Henry House at Manassas Battlefield will be converted into a "discovery center" for visiting school groups, with hands-on and computer activities for students. (Robert K. Sutton NPS photo)

The renovation project will also include heating and ventilation improvements at the park's Stone House, another key battle landmark. The projects are likely to be done during the 2004 summer season.

Sutton said he expects next to win funding for major restoration of the Brawner Farm house. Although a 1904 addition and a second story postdate the war, Sutton, an architectural historian, believes the older part of the house was standing when heavy fighting took place in the yard.

"The end of the Confederate line was almost literally on the corner

The Henry House, destroyed by Union shelling during First Manassas, was rebuilt in the 1870s. The unoccupied two-story structure has also been neglected, Sutton said, and has sustained major termite and groundhog damage.

Sutton said the planned "discovery center" would provide the park an opportunity to accommodate school groups. It will give youngsters hands-on activities with computer stations and "props" such as soldier uniforms and accessories.

"The Civil War essentially started here," said Sutton, explaining the park's new focus on the house. The park acquired the building in the 1960s, "and we really haven't done anything with it." Reacting to severe insect damage, the park has installed new sills and foundation, but those were only initial steps. "Right now the house is essentially jacked up on an internal framing system."

Of the original structure, the frame is largely intact. One door is believed to be original and will be used as a template to make others. One fireplace mantel is original.

The Sudley Road house was built in the 1840s. A "double pen house" typical of the era, it was initially a small building that was doubled in size several years later by adding a second similar structure. The park has dropped the name Sudley Post Office, and is now calling it the Thornberry House after the original owner, blacksmith and wheelwright John Thornberry.

During First Manassas the house witnessed the passage of Union troops attempting to outflank Confederate positions. It served as a hospital during both First and Second Manassas. Thornberry's daughter Laura wrote reminiscences of both battles, and they are incorporated into the park's new film at the visitor center.