

Bull Run Civil War Round Table (BRCWRT) Preservation Corner

May 25, 2020

(photographs courtesy of Blake Myers unless otherwise noted)



Greetings to all, and we trust that you and your families are doing well and remain safe and healthy during these challenging times of the coronavirus pandemic. Due to the restrictions established as protective measures in combatting coronavirus spread, many of the preservation projects and activities that BRCWRT is involved in have slowed or paused, particularly those projects that involve the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) Section 106 consultation process. While digital technologies and the internet allow many preservation activities to continue, many that require in-person meetings, consultations and physical work have 'paused'. That said, BRCWRT and its Preservation Committee remain active in multiple preservation projects. For descriptions of those projects please see ***Bull Run Civil War Round Table (BRCWRT) 2020 Preservation Focus*** at

http://bullruncwrt.org/BRCWRT/Preservation/BRCWRT%20Preservation%202020_2%2028%202020.pdf

This edition of ***The Preservation Corner*** includes an update on the Historic Conner House in the City of Manassas Park, an update on the Civil War Trails (CWT) program in Virginia and the search for CWT historical marker sponsors, and a discussion on the recently announced Rapidan Front Study in Culpeper County.

Historic Conner House Update

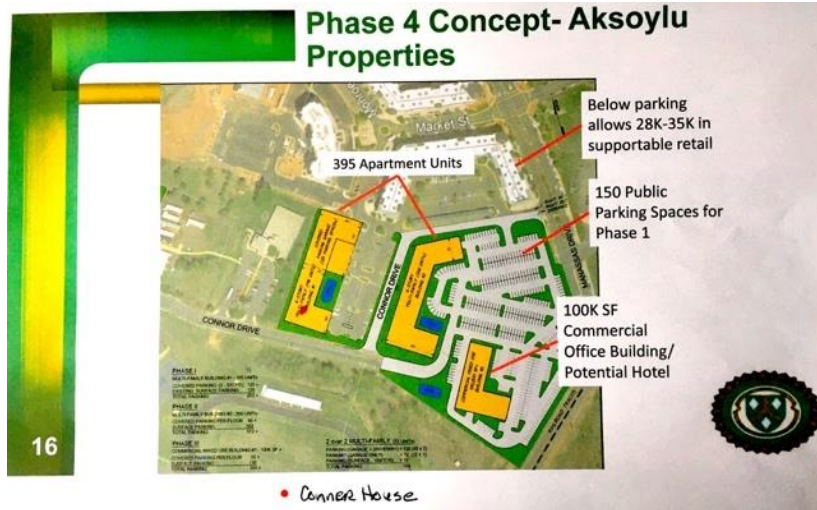
As reported in April 2020, BRCWRT became aware of a preservation threat to the City of Manassas Park's Historic Conner House. A March 31, 2020 *Potomac Local News* article indicated the City of Manassas Park was considering a plan to redevelop the area around the current City Hall at 1 Park Center Court. The article described a four-phased project that would replace the current City Hall with a new multi-story City Hall, retail stores, a city square public plaza, an apartment complex and a nine-screen movie theater, along with the attendant public parking lots and a multi-story parking garage. Phase 4 of the development concept, as presented by City Manager Laszlo Parker at a virtual Public Meeting on March 31, 2020, includes two, six-story apartment complexes, one of which is envisioned to be built on the Historic Conner House site.

Below is a presentation slide depicting the Phase 4 Concept with the Conner House site location indicated by the red dot, and a satellite image of the Conner House site, indicated by the red dot, in the vicinity of 8220 Conner Drive,

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City Center Development, Phase 4 Concept



Satellite Image of Proposed Phase 4 Site, Including Conner House Site Location

The Conner House, located in the vicinity of 8220 Conner Drive in the City of Manassas Park, served from July to November 1861 as the headquarters of Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston, at that time the commander of the Confederate Army of the Shenandoah, and in August 1862 as the headquarters of Colonel Lewis B. Pierce, commander of the 12th Pennsylvania Cavalry, witnessing the action associated with the Battle of Bull Run Bridge on August 27, 1862. The house was also used as a field hospital during the Civil War and is one of the few remaining antebellum homes in the Manassas region.

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Conner House (May 2017)

The fact that the Conner House is the City of Manassas Park's only historic structure would argue for the City to preserve and interpret the structure and its historical significance to the City, Prince William County, and Virginia. Early in the City Center Development Concept consideration and discussions the City of Manassas Park's Governing Body determined that "*considering the amount of work needed, the wonderful availability of so many other historic sites in the immediate area and the need for Manassas Park to obtain financial resources*" that the Conner House not be a factor in their decision making.

The BRCWRT has submitted three letters concerning the Conner House to City of Manassas Park Mayor Jeanette Rishell and the other members of the Governing Body. These letters (<http://bullruncwrt.org/BRCWRT/Preservation/Conner%20House.html>) included information on the history of the Conner House, a summary of the restoration, preservation and interpretation work previously done on the Conner House and information on the value of historic sites in local communities and the availability of preservation grants in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

BRCWRT continues to strongly urge Manassas Park's Governing Board to reconsider its initial decision regarding the Conner House. Our letters have been warmly received by Mayor Rishell and recent indications are that the Governing Body is conducting discussions on the Historic Conner House. If accurate, that is a positive development; however only time will reveal the ultimate destiny of the Conner House.

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BRCWRT members, especially those members who are Manassas Park residents, are strongly encouraged to send letter and or emails to Mayor and Governing Body members encouraging them to reconsider their decision and commit Manassas Park to completing restoration, preservation and interpretation of Manassas Park's only historic site. Contact information for the Mayor and City Council members can be found at <http://cityofmanassaspark.us/mpgovernment/governing-body.html>.



Conner House and Civil War Trails (CWT) Signs (May 2017)

Civil War Trails Historical Markers

Civil War Trails® began in 1994 as a group of historians to successfully link together key civil war sites connecting Petersburg, Virginia to Robert E. Lee's surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Courthouse. It has since evolved into a 501(c)(3), non-profit, educational organization and grown the program to include trails and sites across Virginia, Maryland, Tennessee, North Carolina and West Virginia. Today, the program includes more than 1,200 interpretive signs across these five states, of which 700+ are interpreted for the first time.

Civil War Trails (CWT) is governed by a board of directors comprised of state and municipal tourism officers and other stakeholders and has more than 800 partners (state tourism offices, destination marking organizations, chambers of commerce, businesses, museums, etc.), who support and promote the Civil War Trails program on a daily basis. CWT produces, in collaboration with its partners, fourteen (14) map-guide brochures that are distributed domestically and internationally and are available online and at travel/visitor centers, historic sites, and facilities across the United States and internationally (<https://www.civilwartrails.org/about.html>).

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"Mystery of the Centreville Six" CWT Interpretive Sign (Centreville, Va.)

Once CWT signs are designed, fabricated, and installed the follow up work of sustaining the Trails program begins. This work includes two major efforts – marketing the sites and maintaining the signs. Every CWT interpretive sign is marketed through placement in the appropriate CWT map-guide(s) and other CWT print and digital media. CWT distributes several thousand map-guides each month and their partners promote the sites through the cooperative nature of the program. CWT endeavors to ensure that visitors, whether by chance or design, find an attractive and well-maintained interpretive sign at each site they visit. CWT staff conducts periodic site visits to check the physical infrastructure which supports each site, including the directional signs which accurately guide visitors to the sites along the Trail.

The funds for marketing and maintaining the interpretive signs come from sign sponsorship annual fees of \$200.00. CWT's program calls for each of its interpretive signs to have a designated sponsor, which may be an organization, a business or an individual. BRCWRT currently sponsors the CWT interpretive signs at five local historic sites - Mitchell's Ford (Yorkshire Elementary School, Old Centreville Road), McLean House (Yorkshire/Manassas Park, Route 28/Centreville Road in the CVS lot), Old Stone Church (Braddock Road, Historic Centreville), Fairfax Station (Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, Fairfax Station Road), and the Reid-Ballard House (Cedar Lake Drive just south of Ox Hill Battlefield Park) In recent years CWT has found it increasingly challenging to maintain sponsors for each of its interpretive signs, and continues to seek organizations, businesses and individuals who are history lovers and interested in sign sponsorship. In our immediate area there are five CWT interpretive signs that currently have no sponsor and therefore in danger of removal:

- Cedar Creek, Union Left Flank (Middletown, Va.) <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=78137>
- Mile Hill - Cavalry Clash (Leesburg, Va.) <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=1219>
- St. Johns Episcopal Church - Still Faithful After the War (Historic Centreville, Va.) <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=57135>

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- Pohick Church - Civil War Balloon Outpost (Lorton, Va.) (<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=65051>)
- St. Mary of Sorrows Church - Skirmish at St. Mary's, Victory or Death (Fairfax Station, Va.) (<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=186>)

Recently two BRCWRT members signed up as sponsors of the interpretive signs listed above at St. John's Episcopal Church and at St. Mary of Sorrow Church, effective July 2020.

Any BRCWRT members, who is interested in learning more about sign sponsorship or sponsoring an interpretive sign, is encouraged to contact CWT Executive Director Drew Gruber at executivedirector@civilwartrails.org, or CWT Assistant Director, Chris Brown at administrator@civilwartrails.org. As a contribution to CWT, a properly registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, sponsorship fees are tax deductible to the extent provided by law.

Rapidan Front Study

As announced by Interior Secretary David L. Bernhardt on Friday, May 15, 2020 the U.S. Department of Interior is funding a study of Culpeper County's "Rapidan Front" area of Civil War battlefields and historic sites. The Friends of Cedar Mountain Battlefield has been awarded a \$86,740 grant to research Culpeper's Raccoon Ford, Morton's Ford and Sommerville Ford battlefields, sites that were fought over in 1863 and 1864 during the American Civil War. The three battlefields and associated historic sites, lie along the Rapidan River, which separated the Confederate and Union armies during the 1863-64 time period.

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Aerial Photograph of the 'Rapidan Front', Including Morton's Ford and Raccoon Ford

The grant is part of the \$3 million 2020 grant program recently awarded by the American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP), a program managed by the National Park Service. In announcing the grant awards during a visit to Gettysburg National Military Park, Secretary Bernhardt said, "Battlefields such as Gettysburg are sacred sites where Americans gave the last full measure of devotion. These grants enable us to partner with communities and organizations to preserve these places and connect visitors with their historical importance."

Culpeper County resident Diane Logan, President of the Friends of Cedar Mountain, expressed the Friends' appreciation for the Interior Department's support, saying, "The Friends of Cedar Mountain Battlefield are thankful for the opportunity this grant award has given us. We realize and appreciate the many layers of Culpeper's rich Civil War history, and are excited at the prospect to explore, research and document events and historical sites that contribute to the full story of battle-torn Culpeper."

Susan Ralston, president of Citizens for Responsible Solar, a Culpeper advocacy group, praised the local battlefield stewards, who have protected and maintained part of

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Culpeper County's 1862 Cedar Mountain battlefield since 2004. "Citizens for Responsible Solar is so proud of the leadership the Friends of Cedar Mountain Battlefield is providing in the preservation efforts of these important sites in Culpeper County," Ralston said. "Without their hard work, the rich history of Culpeper's many battlefields and historic sites, which are not as well known or visited, could be lost to development that would destroy the rural and agricultural heritage we love."

The Friends of Cedar Mountain Battlefield has requested Culpeper leaders to delay the county's consideration of a 1,000-acre solar-energy plant near Stevensburg until it can finish its historical study of this area, which includes the area proposed for the solar-energy plant. The all-volunteer Friends group has requested the Culpeper County Planning Commission and the Culpeper Board of Supervisors halt the Greenwood solar project proposed by Florida-based NextEra Energy Resources. Development of the Greenwood plant "would create an integrity hole in the center" of the Rapidan Front study area that could jeopardize other sites from being recognized as nationally significant.

The Rapidan Front study will continue research begun in 2016 to identify threats to the Culpeper area's most important Civil War battlefields and the cultural and agricultural landscapes. For much of the Civil War, the Rapidan River in southern Culpeper County was the geographical border separating Union from Confederate territory, as controlled by the warring armies, Heavy fighting, marching and troop encampments occurred repeatedly along the Old Carolina Road south from Stevensburg toward Morton's, Raccoon and Somerville Fords.

The armies hotly contested the fords' river crossings from 1861 to 1864. Heavy casualties took place along the river as both armies jockeyed for control of what historian Clark B. Hall calls the "Rapidan Front." "This extraordinarily historic acreage - dotted today by several pristine antebellum mansions - is little-changed since the Civil War and richly deserves full preservation protection," Hall says. "This study proposes cultural landscape assessments that will increase protection for the nationally-significant Civil War cultural landscape along the Rapidan River Front, extending northward to vital 1863-64 Union winter encampment venues and the Cedar Mountain battlefield. This assessment is long overdue, and I will do everything I can to support this threshold initiative."

Blake Myers
BRCWRT Preservation Committee Chair