

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Civil War Battlefield Preservation

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Early Preservation Efforts

Almost as soon as the fighting began, soldiers in the Civil War began memorializing their fallen comrades and marking the land where they fought.

Six weeks after the First Battle of Bull Run on July 21, 1861, the war's first land battle, Confederate soldiers in Colonel Francis Stebbins Bartow's brigade erected a large marble obelisk where he fell mortally wounded inscribed with what were recalled as his last words: "Boys, they have killed me, but don't give up the fight."¹

The obelisk disappeared some time before or after the Union army took control of the area after the Confederates withdrew six months later.

The oldest surviving Civil War memorial, the Hazen Brigade Monument, was erected at Stones River near Murfreesboro, Tennessee in the summer of 1863 by soldiers in Union Colonel William Babcock Hazen's brigade to mark the spot where they buried their dead after the Battle of Stones River (December 31, 1862-January 2, 1863).²

In August 1863, just weeks after the battle of Gettysburg, the first efforts to preserve that battlefield commenced when local attorney David McConaughy began purchasing acres of battlefield land that included the heights of East Cemetery Hill and Little Round Top. This land comprised the beginning of the first battlefield park, even if privately owned. Land also was bought for a National Cemetery, which was dedicated November 19, 1863, by President Abraham Lincoln. National cemeteries also were created at Mill Springs, Kentucky, and Chattanooga, Tennessee during the war.

By the 1890s, the era of battlefield memorialization was in full swing and the war's veterans were erecting monuments and memorial stones at Gettysburg, Antietam and other battlefields. During that decade, the United States government established five Civil War battlefield parks, putting them under the jurisdiction of the War Department,

¹ "What happened to the first monument – Col Francis Bartow Monument," <https://civilwartalk.com/threads/what-happened-to-the-1st-monument-col-francis-bartow-monument.110613/>, accessed August 6, 2019.

² See <https://www.nps.gov/places/hazen-brigade-monument.htm>, accessed August 6, 2019.

beginning with the creation of the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park in Tennessee and the Antietam National Battlefield in Maryland in 1890. The Shiloh National Military Park was established in 1894, followed by the Gettysburg National Military Park in 1895 and Vicksburg National Military Park in 1899.³

Not all Civil War battlefields were treated equally. At Manassas, the site of two Union debacles, the push to create a federal battlefield park started in 1901 but became interminably mired in Congress for decades. In 1921, the Sons of Confederate Veterans established a park at Henry House Hill. Finally, in 1940, the federal Manassas National Battlefield Park was created.⁴

Other parks and monuments were established in the early 20th century, including Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park (1917), Fort Pulaski National Monument (1921), Petersburg National Battlefield (1926), Stones River National Battlefield (1927) and Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park (1927). In 1933, when the National Park Service took over ownership and management of the parks from the War Department, there were 11 national military parks, 10 battlefield sites and assorted monuments, memorials and cemeteries.⁵

Although the government has gradually added land to existing parks and established new parks as well, many Civil War battlefields remain privately owned and wholly unprotected. Urban battlefields, such as the field in front of Marye's Heights at Fredericksburg and the battlefield at Franklin, Tenn., were all but obliterated by the early to mid-20th century, covered by development. Other battlefields, large and small, famous and not-so-famous, also faced development threats, particularly those near bigger cities.

At the same time, interest in Civil War history was growing, and Civil War buffs began to organize to share their interest. The first Civil War Round Table was established in Chicago in 1940, spawning a movement that led to the creation of hundreds Round Tables, which provided wellsprings of members and support for the APCWS. Supporters also began to organize to support and protect individual battlefields, with the Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Foundation of Missouri (1950) and the Gettysburg Battlefield Preservation Association (1959) leading the way. Today, more than 100 such groups support and help preserve individual battlefields, working closely with the American Battlefield Trust (formerly the Civil War Trust).⁶

³ See <https://www.nps.gov/chch/index.htm>, <https://www.nps.gov/anti/index.htm>, <https://www.nps.gov/shil/index.htm>, <https://www.nps.gov/gett/index.htm>, and <https://www.nps.gov/vick/index.htm>, all accessed August 6, 2019.

⁴ <https://www.nps.gov/mana/index.htm>, accessed August 6, 2019.

⁵ See <https://www.nps.gov/kemo/index.htm>, <https://www.nps.gov/fopu/index.htm>, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petersburg_National_Battlefield, <https://www.nps.gov/stri/index.htm>, and <https://www.nps.gov/frsp/index.htm>, all accessed August 6, 2019.

⁶ See <https://www.facebook.com/kennesawhistoricalsociety/>, <http://wilsonscreek.com/>, and <https://www.gbpa.org/>, all accessed August 6, 2019; See <https://www.civilwar.org/>, accessed August 6, 2019.

The Modern Battlefield Preservation Movement

In the 1970s and 1980s, the spread of suburban development began to threaten and consume battlefields around cities in the mid-Atlantic region rich with Civil War history, such as Washington, D.C., Richmond, Fredericksburg and Petersburg, Va., Atlanta, Ga., and other locations.

Parts of many major battlefields were already preserved by the National Park Service and, to a lesser extent, state and local governments. But none of the battlefields was wholly preserved and, in most cases, only a fraction of the actual field of combat was protected. At Chancellorsville, just west of Fredericksburg, for example, the battlefield around Salem Church was largely developed by the 1990s, and the key acreage of both the first and second day's battles, though still farmland, was ripe for development.

At Manassas, the national battlefield park itself was threatened in 1957 by a plan to build Interstate 66 right through the heart of the battlefield on the existing Lee Highway. That was thwarted by locally organized public opposition, as was a development project proposed in 1973 by the Marriott Corporation to build a theme park beside the battlefield park.

During the early 1980s, the only nationally focused, private effort to preserve battlefields was that waged by Jerry Russell, who organized the Civil War Round Table Associates and published a newsletter that detailed various threats and problems. Russell's effort, however, was limited to his personal lobbying and using letter-writing campaigns to try to influence state and local governments.

Outside Washington, the Chantilly battlefield was cherished through the Civil War Centennial and Fairfax County held a major ceremony there on the 100th anniversary of the August 1862 battle. By the mid-1980s, the county was ready to cast away all of it to development. The locally organized Chantilly Battlefield Association ultimately was able to secure four acres as a battlefield park, but most of the battlefield was overrun by condos, apartments and commercial buildings.⁷

The desecration of Chantilly battlefield and incipient threats to other battlefields triggered the modern, organized Civil War battlefield preservation movement. In July 1987, a group of concerned historians and Civil War buffs gathered in Fredericksburg to create the first organization designed to save Civil War battlefield land by buying it.

⁷ The Chantilly Battlefield Association no longer exists. It ended when the core issue was settled, but one of the three co-founders, Ed Wenzel, has worked tirelessly and continues to do so on behalf of the park and Fairfax Co. Civil War history. See Bob Zeller, *Fighting the Second Civil War: A History of Battlefield Preservation and the Emergence of the Civil War Trust* (Washington, D.C.: Civil War Trust, 2017), 23-38.

They founded the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites (APCWS), a grassroots organization that acquired its first property in 1988 – a donation of 8.55 acres known as The Coaling, a Shenandoah Valley battle site at Port Republic, Virginia. The next two saves were donations as well, underscoring the need for such an organization to provide an entity to which such donations could be made. The APCWS conducted a membership drive and launched its first matching fund drive effort – a \$50,000 campaign – after receiving a pledge from New York financier Richard Gilder. As cash flowed it, the APCWS began buying land, making new purchases every year. By 1990, the APCWS had saved more than 660 acres at eight different battlefields.⁸

In 1991, another new Civil War battlefield preservation organization, the original Civil War Trust, was created in the mold of the Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island Foundation, but its ambitious plan failed to attract the anticipated corporate donors and soon its role became helping manage the disbursement of the more than \$6 million for battlefield acquisitions gained from the sale of U.S. Mint Civil War commemorative coins.

At the same time the Civil War Trust was created, the federal government created the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission, which did a comprehensive study of the country's Civil War battlefields and their state of preservation. The study, completed in 1993, continues to serve as the primary guide for making battlefield acquisitions.⁹

During the 1990s, the APCWS and the Civil War Trust joined forces on several battlefield acquisitions. From 1987 to 1999, the two groups, combined, funded the acquisition of more than 6,000 acres at almost 50 battlefields in 14 states. Although both preservation groups had the same mission, ongoing conflicts over the distribution of the coin revenues and other issues prompted the boards of both organizations to work toward a merger, which happened on Nov. 19, 1999, with the creation of the Civil War Preservation Trust. In 2011, the Civil War Preservation Trust changed its name and again became simply The Civil War Trust. In May 2018 its name was changed once more to the American Battlefield Trust to recognize its expanded mission in preserving battlefields of the Revolutionary War and War of 1812. .

Preservation as a National Issue

In 1986, the year before the founding of the APCWS, a northern Virginia developer, the Hazel-Peterson Companies, proposed a massive, mixed-use development on the same land at Manassas where the Marriott Corp. had proposed building a theme park a decade earlier.

⁸ The original founders of the APCWS were Gary Gallagher, Robert K. Krick, A. Wilson Greene, Dennis Frye, Brian Pohanka, Donald C. Pfanz, John P. “Jack” Ackerly III, and Edward T. Wenzel, according to APCWS records at the American Battlefield Trust office in Washington, D.C.

⁹ Civil War Sites Advisory Commission, *Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields, Prepared for the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, United States Senate; Committee on Natural Resources, United States House of Representatives; and the Secretary of the Interior*, 1993, <https://www.nps.gov/abpp/cwsac/cws0-1.html>, accessed August 6, 2019.

Although not technically part of the battlefield, the 542-acre tract known as Stuart's Hill was adjacent to the national battlefield and was where Confederate General James Longstreet massed his troops to launch a devastating counterattack that won the Second Battle of Manassas for the South.

Local preservationists won minor concessions but had resigned themselves to the development's inevitability when in January 1988 Hazel-Peterson abruptly announced that its William Center project would now include a massive mall as its centerpiece. This surprise announcement set off a firestorm among local preservationists and citizens, including federal park officials, and grew into a national issue when preservation-minded Congress members held hearings on Capitol Hill and local preservation leader Annie Snyder's tearful presence attracted national media attention.

The controversy led to a rare federal legislative taking of the land in late 1988, but it ended up costing \$135 million – “a better deal...than if we had developed it,” developer John T. Hazel, Jr., noted in 2017.¹⁰ He had paid about \$12 million for the land.

The federal taking of the land, and its cost, was one of the factors that led to the creation in 1991 of the original Civil War Trust, which aimed to tap into corporate donation dollars to fund a more organized method of preserving battlefield land. The hoped-for corporate giving failed to materialize because of the controversial nature of the war and its connection to slavery, prompting Congress to approve the commemorative coin program.

In 1993-94, a second preservation fight gained the national stage when Disney Corporation proposed building a history-based theme park about five miles west of the Manassas battlefield. Although the tract was not battlefield land, the proposed project generated immediate opposition from local horse farm owners as well as preservationists, who believed that a Disney theme park would attract massive collateral development and change the landscape forever, as Disney's presence outside Orlando has changed that area.

Facing heavy opposition from a nationally based opposition group, Protect Historic America, and unsure whether the park would ever make a profit, Disney dropped the project in September 1994. The controversy caused a serious rift within the APCWS leadership. In the face of strong opposition from several APCWS board members, the organization voted to act as history consultants to Disney. The payoff was a \$100,000 donation for battlefield preservation, which was used in part to save land at the Brice's Cross Roads battlefield in Mississippi.

The American Battlefield Protection Program

¹⁰ Bob Zeller, *Fighting the Second Civil War: A History of Battlefield Preservation and the Emergence of the Civil War Trust* (Washington, D.C., Knox Press, 2017), 69.

The American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP), which is part of the National Park Service, was created in 1991 at the same time as the original Civil War Trust and the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission.¹¹

The ABPP provided federal oversight of the distribution of the coin revenues by the Civil War Trust. Since 1998, when the federal government approved its first direct appropriation of \$8 million for battlefield land acquisition, the ABPP has administered and allocated the money through a grant program open to national and local preservation groups.

APCWS leaders in 1997 had tried and failed to obtain a direct federal appropriation. In 1998, they joined forces with Civil War Trust board members to successfully lobby for the appropriation.

The success of this joint effort, and the cooperative atmosphere that existed between the two boards, prompted them to reach beyond strife and infighting at the staff level and merge two often-antagonistic organizations into a single, unified group in November 1999. Carrington Williams, the board chairman of the APCWS, became the chairman of the new Civil War Preservation Trust, while O. James Lighthizer, the primary Civil War Trust board member who helped secure the federal appropriation, became the CWPT president, a position he still holds with today's Civil War Trust.

From 1987 through 2017—the 30th anniversary of the organized battlefield preservation movement—the Civil War Trust and its predecessor organizations saved more than 48,000 acres of battlefield land at 135 battlefields in 24 states. This effort has included more than 600 transactions – mostly fee-simple real estate acquisitions – with a total value of more than \$300 million. Almost 90 percent of the land has been acquired since the 1999 merger of the APCWS and the original Civil War Trust.

In 2014, the Trust expanded its mission to help preserve battlefields of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. In partnership with the Society of the Cincinnati, the Trust created a sister organization, *Campaign 1776*, and has begun saving battlefield lands from those wars. Through 2017, Campaign 1776 had saved 676 acres at nine Revolutionary War battlefields and two War of 1812 battlefields in six states.

Reversing Battlefield Development

In 1997, when the Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County, Tenn., bought a single-family home and lot at 109 Cleburne Street in Franklin, it began a new phase in battlefield preservation – reclaiming developed land, removing modern structures and returning the land to the way it looked during the Civil War.

¹¹ See <https://www.nps.gov/ABPP/>, accessed [August 6, 2019](#).

The archeological study that followed established the lot as the site of the Carter Cotton Gin – the epicenter of the furious battle at Franklin on Nov. 30, 1864 that saw a bloody Confederate frontal assault that was larger than Pickett’s Charge at Gettysburg.

The battle led to a devastating Confederate defeat that in the South was just as well forgotten as memorialized, and by the 1990s, most of the heart of the Franklin battlefield had been developed into a crosshatch of residential streets with single family homes.

Since the purchase of that first lot, local preservationists have joined forces with the Civil War Trust, the ABPP and other agencies and organizations to purchase more properties, including a strip mall and a pizza parlor on Columbia Avenue, the main artery through the battlefield. These properties have been razed and combined into an expanding, multi-acre Carter Hill Battlefield Park.¹²

To become more effective, the local preservation and history groups, including the Heritage Foundation and the Save the Franklin Battlefield, have joined forces to become Franklin’s Charge, which is spearheading Franklin’s innovative approach to reclaiming its history.

The Civil War Trust, while working with Franklin’s Charge to reclaim land in Franklin, has employed the same strategy at other battlefields, most notably Gettysburg and Antietam.

At Gettysburg in 2014, the Trust bought a prime 4.14-acre parcel on Seminary Ridge that included the stone house that served as General Robert E. Lee’s headquarters, a motel and a restaurant. It razed the non-wartime structures and returned the acreage to its 1863 appearance. At Antietam, the Trust removed a post-war house and barn in the heart of the battlefield next to the Bloody Cornfield.

While it is far preferable to preserve a battlefield before it has been developed, that can be a daunting proposition with land that has become highly marketable and desirable. In 2006, The Trust purchased the 247-acre tract known as Slaughter Pen Farm on the southern end of the sprawling Fredericksburg battlefield of December 1862. The \$12 million price tag is the Trust’s most significant saves as well as the costliest private battlefield preservation initiative in American history. The Trust worked in partnership with the Tricord, Inc. development company, the American Battlefield Protection Program, SunTrust Bank, and the Central Virginia Battlefield Trust to buy and preserve the largest remaining unprotected part of the Fredericksburg battlefield, and the scene of a Union assault and a furious battle that rivaled the simultaneous charge at Marye’s Heights.

¹² See <https://boft.org/battlefield-reclamation>, accessed [August 6, 2019](#); See <https://franklinscharge.org/>, accessed [August 6, 2019](#).

Recent Battlefield Preservation Fights

Most recently at Gettysburg, the Civil War Trust joined a local preservation organization, No Casino Gettysburg, to thwart two separate threats to allow a casino to be built near the battlefield, one in 2005-06 and another in 2010-11. And in 2009-2011, the Trust joined with local and national preservation groups to turn back a proposal to build a Walmart superstore on historic land next to the Wilderness battlefield.

In May 2002, after a developer announced a plan to build 2,300 houses and two million square feet of commercial space on a 790-acre farm in the heart of the Chancellorsville battlefield, the Trust formed the Coalition to Save Chancellorsville, a network of national and local preservation groups that successfully thwarted the project after a 10-month campaign. Since then, the Trust has acquired two parcels totaling 214 acres in 2010 and 2013.

In 2017, the 38 acres at Barlow's Knoll, Gettysburg where Brigadier General Francis Channing Barlow's Division tried and failed to stop advancing Confederates under Brigadier General John Brown Gordon was acquired by the Civil War Trust. And the 87-acre site at Brice's Cross Roads in Mississippi, where U.S. Colored Troops prevented Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest from capturing Union Brigadier General Samuel Davis Sturgis' Union army was also acquired and preserved.

Conclusion

The history of Civil War battlefield development is rife with preservation battles – victories and losses alike – at most major battlefields. For example, Little Round Top at Gettysburg for many years was the home of Tipton Park, an amusement and commercial facility operated by photographer William Tipton. When the privately-owned Gettysburg Electric Railway built a railroad excursion line through the battlefield in the early 1890s, the federal government sued to stop it, leading to a landmark Supreme Court ruling that allowed the government to condemn battlefield land for preservation and remove the commercial intrusion. Little Round Top is part of the Gettysburg National Military Park, but still shows evidence of Tipton Park and the electric railway line.

But the greatest progress in battlefield preservation was not won in the courts. It was achieved by private citizens alarmed by rampant battlefield development. They saw a need to preserve these historic sites and gathered together in 1987 to form the grass roots APCWS to save battlefields by buying them. In the next 30 years, the movement grew beyond the founders' greatest expectation as the APCWS became the Civil War Trust and now the American Battlefield Trust. In 2018, the Trust announced that it had exceeded the benchmark total of more than 50,000 battlefield acres preserved at more

than 130 different battlefields in 26 states, with more in the works and many more planned for the future.¹³

¹³ “American Battlefield Trust Reaches Historic Milestone: 50,000 Acres of Hallowed Ground Saved,” American Battlefield Trust news release, May 31, 2018. Accessed July 10, 2018 at <https://www.battlefields.org/news/american-battlefield-trust-reaches-historic-milestone-50000-acres-hallowed-ground-saved>