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The American Battlefield Protection Program —Forging Preservation Partnerships at Historic Battlefields

In the late 1980s, Congress and the secretary of the Interior found themselves embroiled in a struggle between land developers and land preservationists. At stake were 542 acres of historic¹ land adjacent to the Manassas National Battlefield Park in Virginia. The developer had local political support, but the preservationists had national public support. Ultimately, Congress authorized federal condemnation of the land, compensated the landowners at a cost of more than \$120 million, and added the newly taken tract to the national park. The secretary and Congress learned two significant lessons as the most recent “Battle of Manassas” unfolded. First, national public concern and support for the protection of Civil War battlefields were tremendous. Second, reactive federal efforts to protect land are much too costly to be politically or fiscally viable in the future.

Since the Manassas controversy, the federal government has taken a different, proactive approach to protecting historic battlefield lands, most of which are in private ownership.² In 1990, the Secretary of the Interior established the American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) within the National Park Service to help protect 25 Civil War battlefields the Secretary deemed to be among the most significant and endangered in the country. The ABPP was set up to provide technical and financial assistance to state and local governments and nonprofit preservation organizations that endeavor to identify, evaluate, plan for the preservation of, and interpret battlefields. The ABPP could not, however, provide funds

for the acquisition of battlefield lands, since that was the scenario the federal government was trying to avoid.

Soon after the ABPP began its work, Congress created the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission. The commission's charge was to determine which Civil War battlefields should and could be saved by immediate or long-range preservation action. More than 10,500 armed conflicts occurred during the Civil War. The commission concentrated on the 384 most historically significant battle sites. Each site was surveyed, documented, and evaluated based on its historic significance to the war, a campaign, or local events; the condition of the battlefield; and the immediate threats to the site.

In its 1993 *Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields*, the commission found that 50 battlefields (a list that included Gettysburg, Antietam, Vicksburg, and Chickamauga) were in need of immediate preservation action. Seventy-eight more were largely intact, and presented excellent opportunities for complete preservation. The commission reported that 105 more, most of which were already partially protected, needed "some additional protection," and that 135 were fragmented so badly that little chance remained for preservation or restoration of the battlefield landscape *in toto*.³ The commission also studied alternative battlefield preservation strategies and made recommendations concerning the roles that federal, state, and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and private landowners should assume to help protect historic battlefields. After issuing its report, the commission disbanded. The ABPP was left to carry out the commission's recommendations. ABPP staff had worked with the commission for two years, and the program had shifted its focus from the 25 battlefields targeted by the secretary to the 384 battlefields studied by the commission.

Since 1993, the ABPP has helped 78 partner organizations and agencies protect and enhance more than 75 historic battlefields. Working with its partners at battlefields as far apart as New York and New Mexico, the ABPP learned quickly that four land-

scape components must be considered if preservationists hope to protect an entire battlefield site. These components are the core area, the study area, significant viewsheds, and buffer zones. The "core area" is the area or areas of the heaviest and most significant fighting during the battle. Core areas are usually the most hallowed ground on a battlefield, and are the first areas targeted for preservation. The "study area" is the area or areas of secondary fighting, troop movements, bivouacs, hospitals, and other services. Study areas are generally more expansive and more difficult to define than the core areas, making them more vulnerable to modern development and destruction. "Significant viewsheds" are unblemished vistas to and from historically important positions on the battlefield. Viewsheds may encompass lands beyond the boundaries of the core and study areas. "Buffer zones," meaning additional lands that may or may not have historic value but may protect historic viewsheds and keep development from abutting historic battlefields (as is plainly the case at such famous sites as Chickamauga and Gettysburg), should also be considered before battlefield land acquisition begins. Taken together, these four battlefield landscape components represent considerable acreage, especially at Civil War sites where the numbers of troops involved varied from a few thousand to more than 100,000. A good example

of a large battlefield is Brandy Station, Virginia, site of the largest cavalry battle of the Civil War, which includes 13,904 acres and is almost all in private ownership.⁴

To protect lands associated with often-expansive battlefields, an arsenal of different preservation, planning, financial, and consensus-building techniques is required. No standard approach applies universally; every site is different and every community is different. The ABPP works closely with State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) to determine possible preservation strategies based on the condition and significance of the battlefields, immediate and long-term threats to the battlefields, local and state political issues, and grassroots support for the battlefields.

In most cases, various combinations of site identification and evaluation, site recognition, public education, community consensus-building, local land-use planning, and partnerships have proved effective in preserving battlefield lands. The ABPP encourages its partners to start the battlefield preservation process with site identification and evaluation. This step should include historical research, archaeological and above-ground resource identification, establishment of boundaries (based on core and study areas and with consideration of significant viewsheds and buffer zones), evaluation of the current

condition of the site, identification of current land use and ownership for the parcels within the determined boundaries, and an assessment of current threats (such as mining activity already on the battlefield or incompatible local zoning ordinances) and possible future threats to the site (for example, could declining agricultural trends lead farmers to subdivide and sell their land to commercial or residential developers?).

The ABPP has worked with more than 20 partner organizations to identify and evaluate battlefield resources at more than 30 sites. One such project was an ABPP-funded survey of all earthworks associated with the siege and battle of Corinth. Staff from the National Park Service's Cultural Resources Geographic Information Systems (CRGIS) facility digitally mapped each resource and produced a report on the condition and possible future preservation of the earthworks. The CRGIS team determined that the original entrenchments extended 29.5 miles, but that only 7.5 miles survive today, and only 16% of the surviving resources are in good condition.⁵ The baseline survey data was entered into a local GIS so local planners and preservationists could monitor and help protect the area's resources. Project partners included the Siege and Battle of Corinth Commission, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Alcorn County, the City of Corinth, the

Tennessee Division of Archaeology, and Shiloh National Military Park.

Once a battlefield has been evaluated and defined, it may need to be publicly promoted to raise community awareness and support for the site. Some communities are completely unaware of nearby battle sites or do not believe the sites are historically significant. A good way to rectify those perceptions is to have the battlefield listed in the National Register of Historic Places or have it honored in some other way. Listing in the National Register signals to local citizens that a battlefield site meets stringent federal and *impartial* criteria for listing, that it indeed deserves to be called historic and is worthy of preservation. National Register listing also helps local citizens, officials, and battlefield landowners realize that they are the stewards of a site that may be important to other people in their state and across the country. Listing in the National Register also gives battlefields and their component resources a modicum of protection if federal or federally funded projects, such as new highways, may threaten the site.

Other honorary designations and awards are also important. In Pennsylvania, the governor, legislature, and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission honored the Brandywine Battlefield with the state's first "Commonwealth Treasure" award in September 1997. Although the Revolutionary War bat-

tlefield was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1961, the state award reiterated the site's importance to the commonwealth, both historically and economically (tourism is Pennsylvania's second-largest industry), and focused public attention on the devastating effects that subdividing traditional farmsteads for residential development has had on the battlefield landscape.

Public participation and education are also integral parts of the ABPP's approach to preserving and interpreting historic battlefield lands. Local property owners are sometimes hostile to attempts by preservationists to identify their land as historically significant: owners suspect preservationists will either take their land or place restrictions on its use. Others in the community may be uneasy about plans to interpret the site and draw unknown numbers of tourists into the area, a decision that may increase local revenue but may also increase traffic and spur unwanted commercial strip development near the battlefield. Local battlefield preservation groups must then balance their efforts between negotiating and building positive relationships with battlefield landowners who want little or no publicity and educating the public about the benefits of protecting and interpreting a historic battlefield. The ABPP requires that public notification and public meetings be incorporated into any planning project receiving ABPP funds. Although pub-

lic involvement slows the planning process, it ensures a decision balanced between the desire to protect every inch of historic battlefield land and the need to respect the wishes of landowners and neighbors.

In northern Georgia and southeastern Tennessee, the ABPP funded the Chattanooga Area Civil War Sites Assessment in 1996. The goal of the assessment was to identify and evaluate sites associated with the campaigns for Chattanooga and Chickamauga, and develop management objectives and preservation strategies for significant sites. Public participation was essential. The assessment's multi-agency planning team invited all battlefield landowners to participate in the team's site visits and public meetings. During site visits, owners and interested neighbors learned about the history of the site and provided comments about possible preservation treatments. During the public meetings, the team discussed the benefits of preservation, such as tax credits and tourism revenue, and the mechanisms of preservation, such as scenic easements and local land-use regulations. Several landowners who attended the site visits and meetings later approached the assessment team to discuss placing voluntary easements on their properties. The planning team also personally invited local elected officials to meetings, and, when they were unable to attend, offered follow-up briefings. Now faced with implemen-

ting the recommendations, the planning team expects little public or governmental resistance because the assessment process encouraged local participation in the project from the very beginning, which in turn led to the community's understanding and sense of ownership of the project and its goals.⁶

Public support for battlefields usually builds political support for preservation. Unfortunately, many local planning departments and elected officials continue to sacrifice historic sites in the name of development, progress, and tax revenue. In August 1997, a local government was faced with cutting through a nationally significant line of earthworks associated with Civil War coastal batteries to provide vehicular access to two new commercial "super-stores." The battery was included in the local planning department's land-use GIS, but the zoning decision to allow the super-stores did not reflect a thorough evaluation of the impacts of such development on the historic resource (or on an adjacent wetland, the alternative access route). While this example is small in scale to the detrimental effects of insensitive planning on large battlefields, it does represent the symptomatic apathy of many local governments to plan seriously for the protection of cultural landscapes and resources. Local governments committed to protecting historic battlefield lands and resources in the long term will incorpo-

rate cultural resources information into local planning databases, place historic district overlay zones on battlefields, and perhaps most importantly, establish a policy of preservation for battlefield resources in the government's comprehensive plan.

In 1993, the ABPP entered into a cooperative agreement with Spotsylvania County, one of the fastest-growing counties in the commonwealth of Virginia, to survey Civil War resources associated with the battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House and incorporate data on those resources into the county's comprehensive plan. Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park (FSNMP) was the third partner in the project. The ABPP provided \$50,000 for the county and park to identify significant battlefield lands and viewsheds, determine the current and expected development pressures on those lands, and establish a county policy for their treatment. In cooperation with the ABPP, the National Park Service's CRGIS team digitally mapped the Civil War resources both in public and private ownership. Data on approximately 7,000 acres of privately owned battlefield land was ultimately incorporated into the county's land-use GIS.⁷ The three-year partnership between the National Park Service and Spotsylvania County not only resulted in a Civil War resources component in the county's comprehen-

sive plan, it also improved relations between county officials and the park and raised awareness within the county planning department about the importance and sensitivity of the resources. The county now invites FSNMP to comment on land-use changes, such as re-zoning and subdivision permitting, that may affect the inventoried Civil War resources. FSNMP and county staffs also work with developers to avoid unnecessary destruction or damage to viewsheds, earthworks, archaeological sites, and other resources while still capturing the developer's earning potential from the investment.

In 1994, the ABPP expanded its scope from primarily Civil War battlefields to battlefields associated with other wars. Incompatible development and neglect at these sites are often more ominous than threats to Civil War sites. The histories of other wars—though just as significant in our nation's history—have not captured the country's imagination as has the Civil War. Few Americans, for instance, can name more than two battles that occurred during the War of 1812, let alone why the war occurred at all. And while the Civil War had a direct and personal effect on people from nearly every state in the country, other wars were regionalized, such as the Mexican War and even the Revolutionary War. The lack of national memory of and support for these battlefields endangers them further.

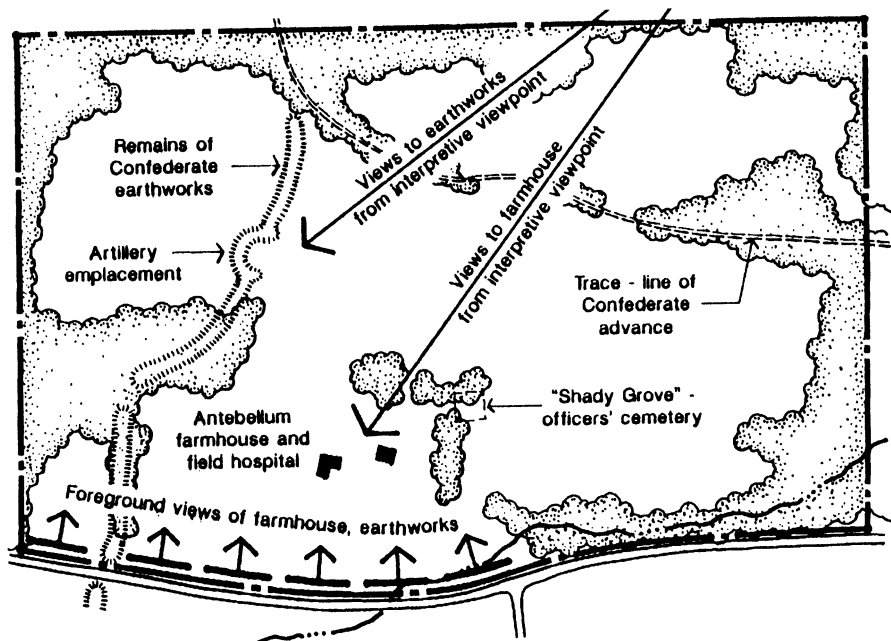


Figure 1. Many farms in Spotsylvania County, Virginia, contain features relating to military events of the Civil War. Few of these features are currently protected, but could be preserved through sensitive site planning.

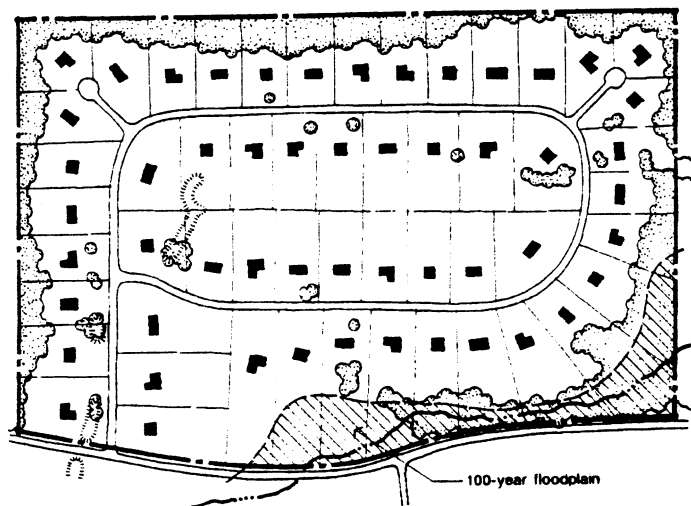


Figure 2. Zoning ordinances in most counties allow land to be subdivided and developed in a "checkerboard" pattern, which maximizes individual lot sizes but also destroys significant cultural resources. This plan contains fifty-four two-acre lots.

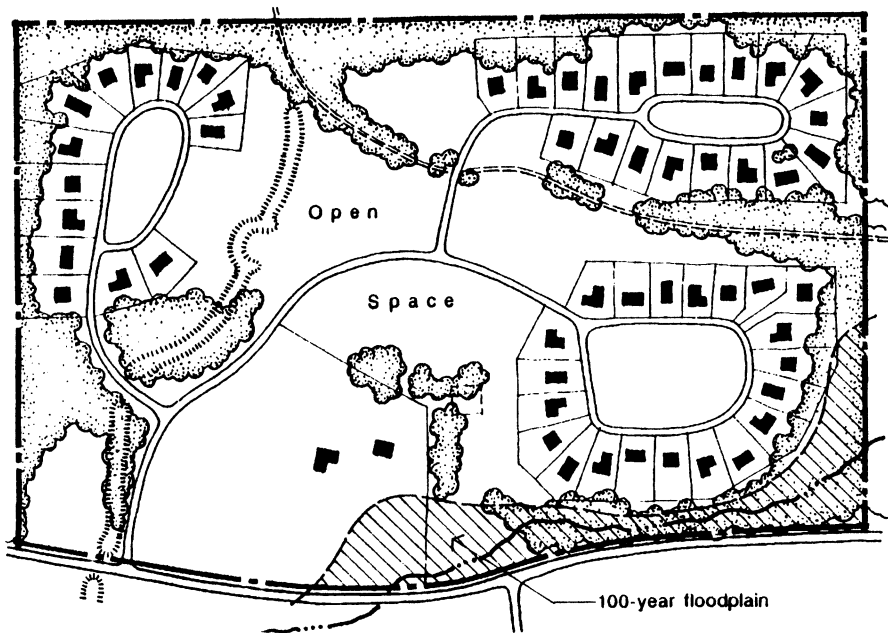


Figure 3. Creative lot averaging and cluster development techniques can yield maximum housing while sparing historic features and providing scenic and recreational open space for homeowners. This plan contains fifty-four 0.75-acre lots and a 17-acre historic farmstead.

The ABPP encourages its partners to look for battlefield preservation and public education opportunities at all types of battlefield sites. Since 1994, and apart from ongoing work at Civil War battlefields, the program has sponsored surveys of battlefields associated with the Great Sioux War of 1876-1877 and Mexican War battlefields in Texas and California, two Revolutionary War battlefield preservation planning and consensus-building projects in New York and Pennsylvania, interpretive signs at a French and Indian War site in Pennsylvania, and a multi-media education project at a World War II battlefield in the Aleutian Islands,

Alaska. The ABPP recognizes, however, that this is ad hoc preservation at best. Similar to the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission's study, comprehensive, national battlefield surveys and evaluation processes are needed for each of these other wars. Congress has agreed. In November 1996, it enacted and President Clinton signed the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Historic Preservation Study Act of 1996.⁸ In 1997, the director of the National Park Service chose the ABPP to coordinate the study once Congress appropriates funds for that purpose.

Congress officially authorized the ABPP in 1996. The authorizing leg-

islation gave the program broad powers to use cooperative agreements, grants, contracts, and "other generally adopted means of providing financial assistance" to "assist citizens, public and private institutions, and governments at all levels in planning, interpreting, and protecting sites where historic battles were fought on American soil during the armed conflicts that shaped the growth and development of the United States."⁹ The inclusive language of the authorization affirmed the ABPP's perception that all historic battlefields—not

just Civil War sites—should benefit from federal preservation efforts.

In seven years the ABPP has helped protect, interpret, or enhance more than 75 battlefields. The total cost has been roughly \$7.2 million, only 6% the amount of the one-time federal purchase of battlefield land at Manassas. While emergency preservation efforts are still required at some sites, the ABPP will continue to encourage local, state, and federal partnerships that lead to pre-crisis planning for the preservation of America's historic battlefields.

Endnotes

1. For the purposes of this paper, "historic" defines a site that meets the eligibility criteria for the National Register of Historic Places or is one of the 384 principal battlefields named by the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission.
2. Civil War Sites Advisory Commission, *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; the Committee on Natural Resources, United States House of Representatives; and the secretary of the Interior (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1993), 18.
3. *Ibid.*, 49-53. Totals do not add to 384 because of missing information for the remaining 16 sites.
4. National Park Service, "Supplementary determination record for Brandy Station Battlefield and related locations," National Register of Historic Places (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, April 1992).
5. National Park Service, *Atlas of Surviving Civil War Features in the Vicinity of Corinth, Mississippi*, prepared by the Cultural Resources Geographic Information Systems Facility in cooperation with The Friends of the Siege and Battle of Corinth and the American Battlefield Protection Program (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1997), 4-5.
6. Patrick Reed, James Ogden III, and Chris Abbett, "Planning partnerships work: The Chattanooga Area Civil War Sites Assessment," *CRM* 20:5 (1997), 12-14. Represented on the assessment planning team itself were the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency, Coosa Valley Regional Development Center, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Southeast Tennessee Development District, Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, and the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites, Inc.
7. National Park Service, *Administrative Guidelines for Assisting Landowners and Local Government Jurisdictions in Evaluating Civil War Battlefield Sites* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1996), I-1.
8. P.L. 103-333, Section 603. Congress and the president authorized, but did not appropriate funds for, the study. As of January 1998, the study remains unfunded.
9. P.L. 103-333, Section 604. The ABPP is authorized for ten years from the date of enactment.

Figures 1-3 are from National Park Service, the County of Spotsylvania, Virginia, and the Natural Lands Trust, *A Community Guide to Protecting Civil War Battlefield Sites and Features in the Fredericksburg Region of Virginia* (1996), 6-8.

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