As summer winds down and the leaves begin to fall, it must be time for another Antietam anniversary. This year's Sharpsburg Heritage Festival will expand to two days and will again feature several members of SHAF providing free lectures. We hope to meet you there and we'll be happy to spend some time chatting about our favorite historic site.

Another exciting event this season is a tour of the Shepherdstown Battlefield including wading the Potomac River and visiting some of the fighting areas which are on private property. Details can be found on our website, SHAF.org. The proceeds benefit the Shepherdstown battlefield Preservation Association, a most worthy organization.

October will also feature a great chance to get a personal tour of the West Woods attack and the Bloody Lane fight by the author of the best book on the topic. Dr. M.V. Armstrong will speak at a dinner October 10 and then lead tours the next day covering these two critical parts of the battle. Again, details are on SHAF.org and we encourage your attendance. Space is limited, so act quickly.

Long-time members may note that this is a busier season than we have had for some time. That is true, and we’re glad we can offer some new and exciting things to do. Our work still goes on, as you can see from our signing over Tolson’s Chapel to a new Friends group, replacing the old hospital signs and donation to paint and restore the Poffenberger house. We are grateful, always, for your support, and hopeful that the Antietam Valley and the environs of the battlefield will remain the best preserved battlefield in the country.

Sincerely,
Tom Clemens

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

2021 was better than 2020. Yes, we continue to deal with a pandemic, which forced cancellation of events, including our annual membership meeting. But we did have good news in 2021.

In the summer, SHAF purchased two properties bordering the park. Both tracts are important to understanding the Final Attack field. Both have structures that we will demolish.

As you know, SHAF has no paid staff. We do not send reminders about paying dues as it is too labor-intensive for our volunteer staff. Many of you are conscientious about contributing regularly. If you haven’t recently, please do.

We have built up our treasury with your contributions, as our yearly expenses are quite small. That money allowed us to quickly jump on this opportunity, as the first property we bought was new on the market. (See view above from our Harper’s Ferry Road property.)

We paid cash and were willing to take the property “as is.” This was possible because of your contributions. Now our task is to solicit matching grant funds. Please continue to contribute so we can move quickly again when another opportunity presents itself.

We are grateful for your support. Our aim is to use your contributions wisely for preservation efforts at America’s best-preserved battlefield!

Tom Clemens
President, SHAF
Of all the desperate and dramatic actions at Antietam, none eclipse the late-afternoon advance of the Union Army’s Ninth Corps. More than 10,000 men attempted to crush the thinly defended left flank of Lee’s army, cutting it off from its only route of retreat. With few infantry troops to hold the line, Confederate artillery stepped up to prevent a disaster.

Capt. John B. Richardson of the Washington Artillery of New Orleans described his part in this action: “[I] placed my battery in line on the right of Brown’s and McIntosh’s battery and was in this position when the Federal Line formed and made that magnificent charge on this position, in which the two batteries mentioned were captured with some others, the left of the Federal Line not extending quite to my battery. I managed to save it by moving to the right around some haystacks and in the confusion, got away and joined the new line.”

As many of you know, the last-minute arrival of A.P. Hill’s division flanked this Union line and saved the day for the Army of Northern Virginia. Hill detached the 28th N.C. Infantry to support Richardson’s guns, as Col. James Lane of the 28th remembered: “Gen. A.P. Hill dashed up from the direction of Sharpsburg, & ordered me to move at a double quick in the direction of Sharpsburg & defend an unsupported battery in an open field to the left, & drive back the enemy who was advancing through the field of corn on the right. I halted in front of the battery & threw out skirmishers in the corn.”

This dramatic conclusion to the bloodiest single-day battle in American history did not happen on the Antietam National Battlefield property. It happened on private property across the Harpers Ferry Road from the national park boundary—ground long ignored.

This past summer the SHAF board of directors saved this historic land. We purchased a house on a half-acre lot where Richardson had placed his battery. A few months later, we also purchased the half-acre lot next to the house, including more land occupied by Confederate artillery.

How did this action come about?

Because SHAF had a “war chest” of cash, we quickly bought the lot with the house (above) when it came up for sale. Normally we would collaborate with our good friends at American Battlefield Trust for this purchase, but we had to move fast. ABT is collaborating with us on this purchase and helping us with grant applications—we are grateful for their help.

When the owners of the adjacent lot heard about our purchase, they agreed to sell that half-acre lot to us. Now SHAF owns a full acre of land where this dramatic story can be told. The view of the Final Attack field from these properties is spectacular!

Thanks to your contributions and SHAF’s careful management of funds, we bought these properties with cash. With the help of matching grants and donations, we aim to move quickly when another targeted property comes up for sale. Your donations are critical to these efforts.

So far we have spent more than $210,000 for the lots. We also must pay for demolition of two structures on the properties. For our small group of unpaid volunteers, this is a big challenge.

Soon we will demolish the structures and restore the ground to its original appearance. Our goal is for this land’s incorporation within the national park. We want visitors to experience the incredible view of the battlefield from this elevated spot, which we hope will someday be part of the driving tour.
Remembering the Murfins

Longtime natives of Washington County, Jim and Nancy Murfin dedicated their lives to Antietam.

Born in Hagerstown, Md., in 1929, James Vernon Murfin grew up near great historical parks. He was trained as a commercial artist and worked in publications at Fairchild Aircraft and in the Air Force. He worked for Historical Times Inc. in Gettysburg, Pa.; Kiplinger Washington Editors and the U.S. Capitol Historical Society. He spent his personal time researching and writing.


In 1967, he joined the National Park Service in the Publications Division at Harpers Ferry. He was a founding member and past president of the Hagerstown Civil War Round Table. He wrote and published until his death in March 1987, leaving a legacy of more than a dozen books, numerous articles, and other publications.

Jim was devoted to preservation of the battlefield. He helped guide the purchase of farmland by the National Park Service, and the theater at the Antietam visitors center was named for him soon after his death.

Nancy Jane Hammond was born in nearby Keedysville, a few miles from Sharpsburg. She married Jim, her high school sweetheart, in April 1951 and resided in Hagerstown and later Rockville. Nancy was by Jim’s side during his many speeches and presentations about Antietam. She continued Jim’s legacy by staying active in events at the battlefield. She was a home economics teacher in the Maryland Public School System for nearly 30 years.

Nancy was mother of Steven and Susan and grandmother of four. Steven and Susan were also active at Antietam. Steven participated in re-enactments as a child, and Susan worked as a volunteer at Antietam for three years.

Mary Abroe: Bloody Lane

I am overwhelmed by a sense of loss and keenly aware of the cost of commitment. I am reminded too of the words of historian Emory Thomas, who once reacted to burial trenches holding hundreds of Confederate remains at Shiloh by observing that “studying war was fast making me a pacifist.” Upon considering what happened there, Bloody Lane also prompts me to question my own values, to ask “what would I sacrifice everything for?” No other spot anywhere draws from me the kind of visceral, personal reaction that one special place at Antietam does.

John Banks: 16th Connecticut Monument in 40-Acre Cornfield

On the south end of the battlefield, the site isn’t visited by most battlefield tourists. A pity. There are stories lurking all over the rolling field. When I’m there, typically alone, I think of three soldiers in that hard-luck Connecticut regiment: Captain Newton Manross and privates Henry Adams and James Brooks. A 38-year-old professor from Bristol, Conn., Manross was a beloved figure in the 16th Connecticut. The severely wounded Adams, who survived, and Brooks, who did not, lay in the cornfield for more than 40 hours before they were discovered. Years later, Adams wondered: “Why did I not die?”

Jim Broomall: Smoketown Road

It is not a place but rather an undulating, winding road. Although portions are paved, the best section is rutty and gravel. Where it intersects with the Old Hagerstown Pike, some of the day’s fiercest fighting occurred. For me, though, the long stretch that eventually hits the Keedysville Road is best. Pastures and cultivated fields flank each side. Stately trees stretch overhead. It is not too difficult to walk it and imagine the troops streaming down it toward battle and then staggering back to nearby hospitals in the aftermath.

Jerry Bucey: 15th Massachusetts Monument

To me standing on the hill looking at the magnificent vision of the wounded lion brings a vivid feeling of the pain, sacrifice, cruelty that the war brought to the men who fought at Antietam and to our whole nation. The lion, wounded but strong and proud, also shows how our nation survived and began to rebuild.

Tom Clemens: Maryland Monument

I am a Marylander, but that is not why it is my favorite. This is the only monument on the field that recognizes men who fought on both sides of the conflict. Its inscription – “Erected by the state of Maryland to honor her sons who, on this field, offered their lives in maintenance of their principles” – makes no judgments but emphasizes reconciliation and unity. Important themes for all of us to consider in these times.
Dennis Frye: Irish Brigade Soldiers’ Burial Site
Bloody Lane, 200 yards north of the tower, at a stone ledge and copse of trees. Here I helped organize and coordinate an archeological excavation in 1988 of Irish Brigade soldiers’ remains first discovered by a metal detector. My greatest memory was extracting a smashed minie ball from one soldier’s chest cavity – the kill bullet. I’ll never come closer to the Civil War.

David A. Langbart: Final Attack Area at 12th Ohio Infantry Monument
There are many iconic spots on the Antietam battlefield – the Cornfield, the West Woods, the Bloody Lane. My favorite spot, however, is more isolated. From that vantage point one can see the entire field of action of the culmination of the battle – the advance of the Ninth Corps to the heights of Sharpsburg and the 40-Acre Cornfield where A.P. Hill’s division crashed into the left flank of the Union advance. It’s historic and beautiful and hardly anybody goes there.

Bill Maharay: Pry Mill Area
It includes one of the Antietam stone bridges. The Cost house and mill were used to care for the wounded.

Sharon Murray: Whatever spot I occupy at sunrise with a camera and my faithful rottweiler. It is at this spot, at a given moment, where the sacrifice and serenity that is Antietam is most apparent.

Kevin Pawlak: East Woods
My favorite time there is in morning, alone, contemplating what the eerie night of September 16 was like for the soldiers there on both sides. The tension in the air was palpable. Everyone from the highest generals to the lowest privates knew what would happen when the sun rose on September 17, 1862. The East Woods is a great place to ponder the long arc of history that brought the armies to Sharpsburg, and how Antietam changed that history for the country and the individuals who fought there.

Paula Reed: Cultural Landscape
With its 18th- and 19th- century farmsteads, roads, field patterns, fencerows and natural features, the landscape is incredibly appealing and reflects centuries of habitation, agriculture and transportation. Into this bucolic scene came one horrific day of intense fighting. On that day the peaceful landscape transformed immediately. Now the farms, roads and natural features that make up this cultural landscape carry a special historical connection with the American Civil War that will remain forever.

John Schildt: South Wall of National Cemetery:
For years I led Staff Rides for the U.S. Army’s Advanced Chaplain’s School. We concluded the day at the south wall of the national cemetery. Summer evenings involved twilight tours of the cemetery. We also ended the tour at the south wall. Before us was the advance of the Ninth Corps, and off to the right was the 9th New York Monument. We could envision the battle flags, the thunder of the artillery and the whistle of the bullets, along with the screams of those being struck down. Often folks were in tears, or would break out singing the Battle Hymn. I like to go to the south wall and ponder the day the Union was saved.

Harry Smeltzer: Upper Bridge
On the evening of Sept. 16, 1862, Hooker’s First Corps crossed Antietam Creek at and near the Upper Bridge. Not only did the bulk of the Army of the Potomac reach the battlefield this way, but a century prior fellows named Braddock and Washington crossed the creek here on their road to defeat. Little of the viewshed has changed. The trace of the road used by Joseph Hooker to approach the bridge is easily imagined, and the rolling vista as the road rises on the west side of the bridge over farmland is evocative. There are a few modern intrusions, but the setting remains relatively pastoral. It’s the one spot I visit each time I go to the field, and my preferred route to enter the park.
SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT: JOHN GUINN HANNA, 6TH GEORGIA

A Crisis Averted at the Reel Farm

By Dennis Frye

It reigns as the most awful sight I ever witnessed at Antietam.

For Sale

The billboard sign glared at me as I slowed along Sharpsburg Pike. It stood conspicuously, immediately opposite the main park entrance, less than 200 yards from the visitor center.

Those two words – For Sale – beckoned a dark portent for Antietam’s past and future.

The property in question – the historic David Reel Farm – was not within the park’s boundary. No matter that the Reel Farm played a crucial role in the battle. The National Park Service was helpless. Even if it desired to do so, the NPS was prohibited, by law, to negotiate for or to acquire properties outside its legislative congressional boundary.

So, what to do?

The situation was desperate, and deteriorating, at Antietam in 1987. A building boom, spurred by easy loan money from S & L banks (soon a scandal), had flooded the nation with new houses. This tsunami soon breached South Mountain, and Washington County became a lucrative target for developers. All the historic farmland about Antietam was ripe for the picking, and developers began heaving hundreds of thousands in greenbacks at the doorsteps of generational farmers.

Was not Antietam protected from this scourge? No! Only about 20% of the battlefield was preserved in 1987.

Case in point. The Washington County Board of Commissioners asked me to offer a private tour for them to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the battle (1987). Standing at The Cornfield, I informed the commissioners that property was zoned agriculture. Good! they responded. I countered: “That means we can grow one house per acre within the 40-acre Cornfield.”

You read that correctly. The Cornfield was not protected from development. Neither was the East Woods. Nor the West Woods. Nor the North Woods. Nor the Union attack fields at Bloody Lane.

Antietam was in trouble.

Alarms had sounded two years earlier when the same county commissioners had rezoned the historic Grove Farm west of Sharpsburg – site of a famous Lincoln/McClellan photo by Alexander Gardner – for a shopping center. SHAF was born in response. But as a novice organization, SHAF did not have the financial resources to purchase threatened properties at Antietam.

Neither did the American Battlefield Trust. This organization had just been conceived. Its concept was born only one month prior to September 1987. I know, as I was one of the original seven founders. We dreamed big. We knew the threats. We bullied our way into existence to stop the bullying desecration of the battlefields. Little did we realize that one month later we would face a serious crises at Antietam: The David Reel Farm for sale, and we had no money to buy it.
Fortunately for Antietam, three factors converged to prevent its destruction. First, though SHAF had no money, it had a bullhorn, effectively raising the dangers Antietam faced. Through public meetings, newspaper articles, editorials, letters to the editor, petition drives, and court battles, SHAF first embarrassed local leaders, then encouraged them to take action. They did so. Washington County became the first in the country to establish an historic overlay district for all zoning considerations affecting a battlefield. At minimum, this discouraged backdoor and invisible deals without public notice and input.

Second, SHAF’s concerted campaign nationalized, drawing nation-wide attention to Antietam’s plight. This resulted in the National Trust for Historic Preservation naming Antietam in its inaugural “Top Eleven Most Endangered Historic Sites in America.” The initial list appeared in alphabetical order, with Antietam at the top, giving the impression it was the most endangered.

Third, money arrived. But it didn’t come from neophyte battlefield organizations. The Conservation Fund, well established as a leading protector of the environment, caught notice of Antietam, and determined to plunge into battlefield preservation for the first time. Supported with philanthropic funding from the Paul Mellon Foundation, the Conservation Fund purchased the Reel Farm. Success!

Hence commenced a decade-long acquisition program spearheaded by The Conservation Fund at Antietam and other battlefields. Employing Mellon money, the Conservation Fund also acquired The Cornfield, the North Woods, and the West Woods. Each of these sites was within the NPS congressional boundary, and the NPS today owns and manages these battlefield properties.

Not so the Reel Farm. Still today, the Reel Farm remains outside the park boundary. Not because we haven’t tried. For years, the local Republican congressman blocked expansion of the park, believing it would infringe upon private property rights. This despite the Conservation Fund’s desire to donate the property to the people of the United States.

Eventually, the Conservation Fund transferred the land to the American Battlefield Trust – still the owner today.

SHAF now is partnering with ABT to remove vegetation and restore the historic landscape that comprised Lee’s final line at Antietam.

We had another great battlefield Work Day clearing the road frontage at the base of Reel Ridge, where many Confederate troops and artillery were during the battle. The property is owned by the American Battlefield Trust.

Henry Stiles, Dennis Frye, David Langbert, Drew Warlick, Patrick Osborn, and Dave Lutton.

“God, how those fellows [the Rebels] could fight. We pushed them a ways and our regiment got nearer to Sharpsburg than any other, but the enemy pushed us back, and in climbing over a board fence, we lost a lot of our boys. It was a pretty warm place, and after it was over I thought I would take a drink.

“I pulled up my canteen, but there wasn’t a drop of water in it. One of the Confederate bullets had gone straight through it. I threw it as far as I could and picked a canteen off one of the dead Hawkins zouaves from New York. Those fellows wore a red fez and had been shining marks for the Johnnies. Today I would give $25 to have that canteen I threw away.”
SAVE HISTORIC ANTIETAM FOUNDATION
P.O. Box 550
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Join us on Facebook: facebook.com/shafpage

To learn more about our work or to become a member, please visit our website or email us: contact@shaf.org

**PRESERVATION VICTORIES**

- Partnering with the Maryland Environmental Trust and the Maryland Department of Transportation to procure easements, protecting more than 4,800 acres surrounding the Antietam Battlefield.

- Purchasing 40 acres of the Grove Farm, where President Abraham Lincoln was photographed on his October 1862 visit to Antietam. SHAF also purchased a 5-acre lot on the farm to prevent development, where a wayside exhibit now informs the public about the site’s history.

- Acquiring Tolson’s Chapel in Sharpsburg, Maryland, significant for its association with the movement toward African-American social independence and education during the post-Civil War years. SHAF donated the property to a non-profit organization that restored and now maintains it.

- Partnering with the Jefferson County Landmarks Commission, Civil War Trust, and Shepherdstown Battlefield Preservation Association to purchase the historic Cement Mill at Boteler’s Ford on the Potomac River.

- Purchasing the site of the war-time signal tower and placing easements on it.

- Hosting volunteers for biannual work days to help the Antietam National Battlefield (NPS) restore the physical landscape to its 1862 appearance. SHAF also contributed funds to the NPS for restoration of the structures and landscape of the battlefield.

- Contributing funds to restore the 16th Connecticut stained-glass windows of the Christ Reformed Church in Sharpsburg, a site used as a hospital for Union soldiers.

**SPRING WORK DAY SET**

Saturday, March 12, 2022

Weather permitting, probably at Reel Farm frontage on Rt. 65/ Hagerstown Pike. See our Facebook page for further details.