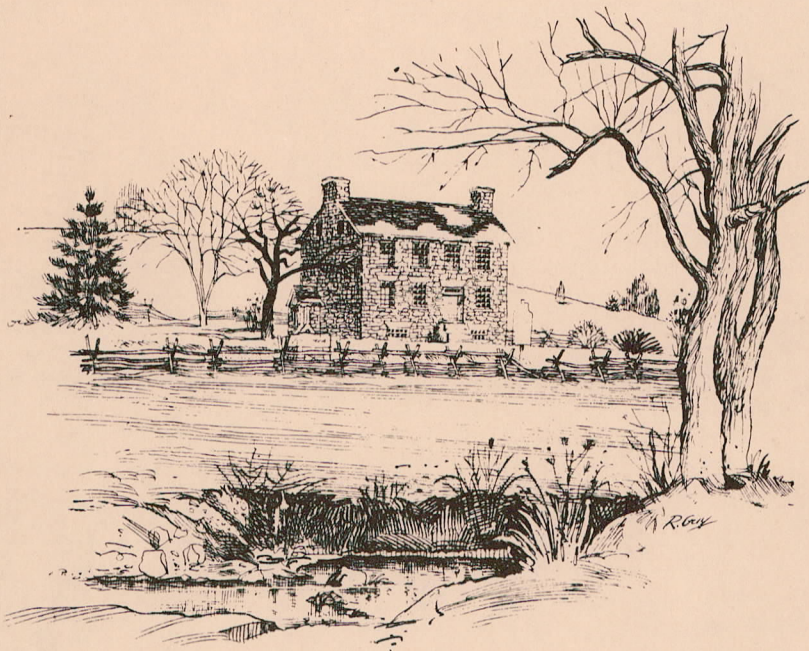


The Stone House

Silent Sentinel at
the Crossroads of History



Michael D. Litterst

In 1865, while visiting Prince William County, Virginia, a traveller stopped at a farm house on the Manassas battlefield. Hoping to gain some information on the conflicts fought just four years earlier, the traveller sought out the owner of the house, who operated a tavern in the structure. Impressed with neither the owner, whom he described as “one of those two-faced farmers, Secessionists at heart but always loyal to the winning side,” nor the barroom, which he considered “as barren as the intellect of the owner”, the visitor described in detail only “a most extraordinary cider” served there, while making no mention of the house or the role it had played during the War.¹

Despite the unfavorable impression the house and its owner made on the traveller at the time, the house, known simply as the “Stone House,” has survived, becoming an enduring landmark of the Manassas battlefields. Unlike the Henry House and the Unfinished Railroad, which are identified specifically with the First or Second Battle of Manassas (or Bull Run, as they were known in the North), the Stone House had a role in both conflicts.

Early Settlement of the Area

The history of the land on which the Stone House was built extends well back into Virginia’s colonial period. The tract has its roots with Virginia’s tobacco magnate, Robert “King” Carter. As an agent for the royal proprietor of the region, Carter was able to patent extensive land holdings that would eventually include over 300,000 acres. In 1729, “King” Carter patented to his son, Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, a tract of 2,823 acres, known as the Middle Bull Run Grant. Present day Young’s Branch (then known as Licking Run), just south of the Stone House, formed the southern boundary of the tract, which included the present-day Stone House property.²

Not until the latter half of the 18th-century, however, was the area settled. Landon Carter, son of Landon Carter of Sabine Hall and grandson of Robert “King” Carter, received the tract as part of his father’s estate. By 1770 he had “seated” the estate at “Pittsylvania,” located between Young’s Branch and Bull Run, just northeast of the present-day intersection of the Warrenton Turnpike and Manassas-Sudley Road. Pittsylvania was an impressive mansion house with out-kitchen, school, weaving house, meat house, ice house, carriage house, barns, slave quarters, formal herb garden, bowling green, and cemetery.³

With the death of Landon Carter in 1801, the original Middle Bull Run Grant was split between his four sons, with the eldest, Wormeley, receiving what would become the Stone House tract and all other lands in Prince William County. By 1805, Wormeley Carter’s inherited estate had grown to some 2,600 acres. Poor health and fiscal problems, however, forced him to sell off parts of the tract to obtain cash. At the time of his death in 1815, the estate had been reduced to just over 1,900 acres.⁴

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, Prince William County grew and flourished. Its proximity to both the new capital city of Washington, D.C., and the lush Shenandoah Valley brought settlers and traffic through the county in increasing numbers.

In an attempt to help Alexandria compete with Fredericksburg for the trade with Fauquier Court House (present-day Warrenton) and Culpeper, the Fauquier and Alexandria Turnpike Company was formed in 1808. The Fauquier and Alexandria Turnpike (later known as the Warrenton Turnpike) was designed to run a total of 28 1/2 miles, from the Little River Turnpike at Germantown (outside Fairfax Court House), through Centreville and Buckland, terminating at Fauquier

Court House. The road was to be a modern thruway, 16 1/2 feet wide and paved with crushed stone of a size that would pass through a three-inch ring. Travellers and teamsters would have to pay for this modern and convenient route; six toll gates were located along the route, each approximately five miles apart.⁵

However, the contract for the construction of the road was not let until December 30, 1812. Though the work proceeded more slowly than expected, by 1815 the turnpike extended from the Little River Turnpike to Buckland, some eight miles short of Fauquier Court House (by then known as Warrenton). However, due to the death of the contractor and financial difficulties in the Fauquier and Alexandria Turnpike Company, thirteen more years would pass before the road reached its terminus.⁶

Construction of the Stone House

With the building of the Warrenton (formerly Fauquier and Alexandria) Turnpike, there arose a need for lodging and food services along the route. As a shareholder in the Fauquier and Alexandria Turnpike Company, Wormeley Carter undoubtedly recognized this need. Additionally, the new thoroughfare would form a major intersection at the Sudley Manor Road on his property. This would make his land a prime site for such services.

The plans for just such a facility, which would also serve as one of the six toll stops along the turnpike, led to the erection of the large, stone, two-and-a-half-story structure that would come to be known popularly as the Stone House. Almost nothing is known definitely about when or by whom the Stone House was constructed. An examination of Prince William County tax, court, and deed records reveals only that the house was built sometime between 1813 and 1828, by either Wormeley Carter or, more likely, his son, Thomas Otway Carter. The first record of the existence of the Stone House occurs on a tax return for the year 1830, two years after the tract of land had been sold by Thomas Otway Carter to John Lee in 1828. Opposite the entry for the 148 acres exchanged in the transaction is the significant entry, "Building added & By and From T.O. Carter."⁷ As to who built the house, credit is given separately to both a Mr. Palmer and "an Irishman named Breton" (possible George Britton, contractor for the construction of the Warrenton Turnpike).⁸ Neither of these claims is supported, however, by any historical documentation.

The Stone House was constructed with locally quarried materials. The exterior walls are comprised of two distinct types of stone, a red sandstone and a yellow sandstone. The initial construction used the red sandstone up to a level from eight to ten feet above the grade, at which point the yellow sandstone was used predominantly. While the majority of the material has an irregular surface, a few of the stones appear to have been altered with a mason's tools.⁹

Antebellum History of the Stone House

On July 12, 1828, Thomas Otway Carter sold the Stone House and 148 acres of land to John Lee for a sum of \$633.55. This transaction ended five generations and more than 100 years of Carter family ownership of the land.¹⁰

Very little is known about John Lee. Originally from New Jersey, the son of Matthew and Sarah Lee, he first appears in Prince William County tax records in 1810. In that year, in partnership with Henry Dogan, he purchased one hundred acres of land from Wormeley Carter. This would be the start of a farm that, at its peak, would approach 1,000 acres. Included in his lands were a 230-acre tract purchased from the estate of Dr. Isaac Henry and a 170-acre parcel that Lee

would later sell to James Robinson, a free black whose property would see heavy action during the first battle of Manassas.¹¹

Though no descriptions of the antebellum Stone House exist, in all likelihood it did not differ greatly from the typical rural American inn or tavern. Furnishings were probably sparse, with a few crude tables and benches in the tavern room. Decorations were in all likelihood scant as well. Perhaps a few handbills were posted on the walls, indicating turnpike and tavern fares. A crude map of the local area may have been posted on the walls, for the benefit of the patrons.

The operation of the Stone House as a tavern and toll stop are generally unknown and open to conjecture. According to oral histories of the area passed down over the years, a wagon stand was kept at the Stone House during John Lee's ownership.¹² This would suggest that the house served the needs of numerous passing teamsters. Being required to stop at the Stone House to pay a toll, teamsters would be the most likely to take advantage of the food, drink, and overnight lodging services being offered.

Located on the major thoroughfare through the area, the Stone House no doubt was witness to much activity from the time of its construction until the middle of the nineteenth century. In addition to the teamsters transporting products back and forth from Alexandria and Warrenton, the turnpike also carried mail service between the capital city and Culpeper.¹³ From the mid-1820s until 1836, this route was handled by William Smith, future Governor of Virginia and brigadier general for the Confederate States of America. Because of his rapid expansion of the mail route (eventually extending as far away as Milledgeville, Georgia) and the frequent extra payments he charged the Federal government for his services, Smith earned his enduring nickname of "Extra Billy."¹⁴

Unlike Governor Smith's nickname, however, the financial success of the Warrenton Turnpike was shortlived. By the late 1830s, the fortunes of the Fauquier and Alexandria Turnpike Company were starting to dwindle. An entry in the company's return for the year ending October 1838 read, "The returns for this year are less than the previous year, due it was thought to diminished number of agricultural products being carried to market." This decline, combined with his advancing years, compelled John Lee to sell the Stone House and surrounding land in 1847 for the sum of one dollar to his son-in-law, Thomas O. Clarke.¹⁵

The expansion of the railroads was also a major cause of the diminished use of the turnpike by farmers and agricultural merchants. By 1836, the Winchester and Potomac Railroad Company had completed a line running from Winchester to Harpers Ferry and a junction with the Baltimore and Ohio. This signaled the beginning of the end for wagon trade in Northern Virginia. Within 20 years, two more lines would be built in the vicinity of the Stone House, further depleting the already dwindling vehicular traffic on the turnpike. The Orange and Alexandria (O & A) Railroad, extending from Alexandria to Gordonsville, had reached Tudor Hall (eventually Manassas Junction) by October of 1851. Only a month before this milestone was reached, construction was begun on the Manassas Gap Railroad. This line would originate from the O & A at Manassas (thus the genesis of the new name of Manassas Junction), and extend westward to Woodstock and the Shenandoah Valley.¹⁶

The Stone House on the Eve of Civil War

With the rapidly expanding railroad network in Northern Virginia and the steadily declining fortunes of the Warrenton Turnpike, Thomas Clarke and his wife apparently decided to dispose of the Stone House property. Having owned

the property for less than three years, they sold it on February 14, 1850 to Henry P. Matthews for \$2,500. Matthews, a forty year old planter, and his wife Jane received 137 acres surrounding the house. With the Stone House toll stop no longer a viable source of income, Matthews purchased the property with the intention of farming it.¹⁷

For the next decade, Henry Matthews farmed the land around the Stone House and managed to carve out a comfortable living for himself and his wife. Census records for 1860 show the Matthews' with a real estate valuation of \$1,600 and a personal estate at \$600.¹⁸ With the dividing and selling of various tracts of land, the number of homes in the area had dramatically increased in the previous 50 years. North of the Stone House was the residence of Martin and Edgar Matthews (no relation to Henry and Jane Matthews), two brothers for whom Matthews Hill was named. To the northeast lived Abraham Van Pelt, his wife Jemina, and their three children. James Robinson, a free black, and his wife Susan lived to the east, on the south side of the Turnpike. To the southeast of the Stone House, lived the survivors of Dr. Isaac Henry, including his widow, Judith Carter Henry, and her four children. To the west of the Matthews lived John D. Dogan, his wife Anne, and their daughter Mary. The swirling events of 1861 and 1862 would have a profound impact on all of these families and their properties. Of these, however, the Stone House remains alone as the sole remaining witness to the tragic events of the Civil War.

First Manassas

As the nation moved closer and closer to armed conflict after the firing on Fort Sumter, it became increasingly apparent that the Manassas Junction area would become a point of strategic importance for both sides. The rail lines, leading west to the lush Shenandoah Valley and south through central Virginia to the Confederate heartland, were important avenues for supplies and men for the infant Confederacy. Wishing to protect these vital arteries, Confederate forces began massing around Manassas Junction as early as May, 1861. When the Union troops set out in search of their Southern counterparts, military activity in the vicinity of Manassas was likely.

Not until Union commander Irvin McDowell mapped out his strategy on the night of July 20, however, did it become apparent just how close to the Stone House the action would take place. McDowell's plan to flank the Confederate position along Bull Run was destined to bring the bulk of the Union forces down Matthews Hill from the north along the Manassas-Sudley Road and, if all went as planned, straight into Manassas Junction. This route of march would bring approximately 15,000 Federal troops directly past the Stone House. However, the failure to properly execute this movement on the part of the Northerners would ensure that the Stone House would witness major events of the coming battle, not merely the passing of the Federal army.

Delays on the morning of the 21st by the Federal flanking column allowed the Confederates to shift the bulk of their defenses from the Stone Bridge, one mile east, to Matthews Hill. With only 900 troops, Confederate Colonel Nathan G. "Shanks" Evans hoped just to block the Federal advance down the Manassas-Sudley Road long enough for reinforcements to arrive. Deploying the 1st Louisiana Battalion (under the command of Major Roberdeau Wheat) and six companies of the 4th South Carolina about 250 yards south of the crest of Matthews Hill, Evans was ready and waiting by 9:30 a.m.¹⁹

Supporting the Confederate infantry on Matthews Hill were two guns - a

section of the Lynchburg Artillery, commanded by Lieutenant George Davidson. Davidson commanded one of the pieces, in battery on the north side of the Warrenton Turnpike, across from the James Robinson farm. The second gun, commanded by Lieutenant Clark Leftwich, took up position on Buck Hill, immediately behind the infantry. Leftwich's position was approximately 100 yards north of the Stone House, with one of its limbers and its caisson parked in the yard of the house. When the opening salvos of gunfire startled the attendant horses, the frightened beasts "ran off, and dashed the caisson to pieces."²⁰

Reinforced with the brigades of Barnard E. Bee and Francis Bartow, Evans' defensive line managed to hold its own for the better part of ninety minutes. Eventually, however, Federal drives against both flanks collapsed the Confederate line. The Union troops, though, were just as disorganized in their success as the Southerners were in their retreat, and failed to capitalize on this turn of events. No orders for pursuit came from the Federal high command and many Union officers made their own decisions to keep moving.

Colonel Andrew Porter, commanding one of the lead brigades, decided to continue the momentum of the Federal success on Matthews Hill. The 27th New York was ordered forward without halting as it arrived on the field. Colonel Henry W. Slocum led his troops down the Manassas-Sudley Road toward the Confederate forces falling back toward Henry Hill.

Major J.J. Bartlett of the 27th reported charging the Confederates, who were "strongly positioned in and about a large stone house, with a battery commanding the approach."²¹ The New Yorkers' thrust quickly sent lingering Confederates headlong from the protection of the Stone House toward Henry Hill. The Empire State troops advanced to the Stone House, where they attempted to reform their lines. Col. Slocum directed the color guard to form to the left of and in the rear of the house, in hopes of redressing the line there.

However, the 27th soon came under a heavy fire from John Imboden's artillery, posted on the heights at the north end of Henry Hill. Slocum ordered his men to shift to the left, in hopes of finding enough cover to restore order to his wavering ranks. What he found instead was a brisk firefight with the Hampton Legion, who were posted in a lane near the James Robinson house. Faced with a stubborn resistance from the South Carolinians, the 27th gave up their hard-earned territory around the Stone House and fell back toward Buck Hill, where they resumed their skirmish with the Legion - albeit at long range.

With Col. Slocum wounded, command of the 27th New York devolved upon Major Bartlett, who allowed the men a slight rest, had their cartridge boxes refilled, and ordered them forward to retake the vital intersection at the Stone House. The New Yorkers again successfully captured the intersection (and the Stone House along with it) and this time were successful in holding it. They took shelter behind the considerable banks of the Warrenton Turnpike, while the Confederates, and, ultimately, the heavy fighting, shifted toward Henry Hill.²²

As the maelstrom of the escalating battle moved south to the fields of the widow Judith Carter Henry, the Stone House came alive with activity. As both surgeons and wounded Union soldiers began to seek shelter from the battle, the Stone House became an obvious oasis. The protection provided by its strong stone walls, the fresh water provided by its well, and its position along the main road back to the hospitals of Washington made the Stone House an ideal field hospital site.

The Stone House quickly swelled to capacity, with wounded Federals filling every inch of the structure's available floor space. Corporal William H. Merrell, a

member of the 27th New York who was wounded in the chest during his unit's final push for the Stone House intersection, reported that the cellar quickly filled, with the men lying on the muddy dirt floor. Likewise, according to Merrell, "the floor above was also covered with wounded soldiers."²³

Despite the fact that the heaviest fighting that afternoon had shifted south to Henry Hill, these wounded troops in the Stone House continued to come under fire throughout the afternoon of July 21. Corporal Merrell reported that "the rattle of musket balls against the walls of the building was almost incessant." A few of the projectiles apparently found their mark as well, entering through the windows of the house and further wounding three of its occupants. Incredibly, according to Merrell, an artillery projectile likewise entered the structure through an open window or door, but passed through the house without further incident!²⁴

This continued shower of lead in the area brought two skulkers from the Confederate lines into the Stone House basement in an apparent attempt to shield themselves from the intense storm of shot and shell. Unfortunately for them, despite their best efforts (one of the men even stashed himself in the cellar fireplace), they were both wounded - one of them severely - as they lay on the floor among the wounded Federals.²⁵

As the battle raged and the Stone House continued to be peppered by shot and shell, some of its wounded occupants apparently became concerned for their further safety. In an effort to signal the building's neutrality as a hospital to the antagonists on the outside, one of the inmates placed a havelock on the end of his bayonet and waved it about. This merely had the effect of drawing more attention to the site, as this signal "was greeted with a shower of balls from the *Confederates* [emphasis original]." Supposing, perhaps, that a more official-looking banner would serve with more effect, "a yellow flag was displayed from the floor above, but it was likewise disregarded." Regardless of the effectiveness of this flag, it apparently remained in place for the remainder of the day. The Confederate troops who retook the structure in late afternoon reported capturing the "stone house of Matthews, from which a hospital flag was suspended."²⁶

As a source of potable water, the well of the Stone House was a busy place throughout the afternoon and was used by troops of both sides. Corporal William Merrell was awestruck as he watched a Federal leave the safety of the Stone House with two canteens in an effort to bring some water back for its wounded occupants. This soldier "received *five or six musket balls*, in different portions of his body . . . yet was not fatally injured."²⁷

Late in the day, with McDowell's army in retreat, a soldier in the 5th Massachusetts could not resist the temptation of fresh water from the well and stopped long enough to fill his canteen. While there he took the time to give a drink of water to a wounded Confederate, and during this delay, was set upon by another Southerner who, "with fierce oaths," demanded his surrender. But the wounded recipient of the Unionist's kindness spoke out on behalf of his Good Samaritan: "No, let him go, he gave me drink." The soldier was then permitted to continue on his way, while others with him were taken captive.²⁸

By late afternoon, the Stone House was in full operation as a field hospital. Federal surgeons who were set up there worked feverishly treating the wounded that kept arriving. As the Union line on Henry Hill crumbled under the weight of the Confederate attack in late afternoon, the Federal troops and surgeons at the Stone House suddenly found themselves behind Confederate lines. The suddenness of the reversal and the disorganization of the Federal medical staff forced some units to abandon their wounded at the Stone House for want of

ambulances. The 5th Massachusetts reported leaving five men at the Stone House, with the possibility that as many as 23 had been abandoned there.²⁹

During the Federal retreat, a company from the 28th Virginia reclaimed the Stone House for the Confederates. These jumpy troops, just completing their first day of battle, entered with drawn bayonets and demanded a surrender, "intimidated as though they had anticipated a successful resistance."³⁰ However, the surgeons were too busy and the wounded too fatigued to offer any protest, and the Stone House fell to the Confederates much more peaceably than it had been taken by the Federals.

According to the official report of Colonel Robert T. Preston, commander of the 28th Virginia, thirty-six Union troops in the Stone House surrendered themselves in the aftermath of the conflict. He reported as well an *additional* unspecified number of dead Federals in the house. The Confederates also captured 100 firearms, suggesting that perhaps as many as that number had passed through the building and received some sort of treatment that day.³¹ Among the prisoners was Corporal Merrell of the 27th New York, who was taken to the Lewis plantation, "Portici," and from there on to Richmond.³²

Also among the captured were a Federal surgeon and assistant surgeon, the latter (after being immediately paroled) remaining to continue working on his wounded compatriots. These two officers were likely Surgeon James Norval and Assistant Surgeon Andrew McLetchie of the 79th New York (Highlanders).³³

Peace Returns to the Stone House - Temporarily

With the immense number of wounded Northern troops left behind on the field, the Stone House was the scene of continued activity for several days after the end of the fighting. The relative calm in the days following July 21 brought not only curious local residents to survey the destruction but newspapermen as well, who reported on the conditions of the area and the curiosities of the battle.

By all accounts the Stone House was a scene of utter chaos in the days following the conflict. As one of the few stone buildings on the battlefield and strategically located at a major intersection, it was likely a busy hospital, and, accordingly, very disorganized. A correspondent from Richmond touring the Federal hospitals in the area during the days immediately following the battle reported:

... in the various hospitals for the wounded enemy, we saw only neatness and careful attention, and of a kindness that elicits a free expression of thanks from the sufferers. We must make one exception. There was one hospital where the filth was so disgusting that our tarry was very brief. It was the stone house on the roadside, where a northern surgeon had charge of his own people. Fortunately, his victims were but few.³⁴

Another of Richmond's daily newspapers made reference to this hapless young Federal surgeon. The *Daily Enquirer* reported on July 26 that a lone "young and apparently inefficient" surgeon had charge of the Federal wounded in the Stone House. The paper reported that he was there at the invitation of General Beauregard himself to care for his fallen comrades. At the time of the reporter's visit, there were thirty-two wounded in the house, "their clotted wounds still undressed."³⁵

Among the local visitors to the Stone House to see first-hand the wounded and captive Yankee soldiers in those initial days after the conflagration was a young girl and her mother. As they passed among the injured Federals, the girl (in apparent response to some frenzied, pre-war rhetoric of her parents) ex-

claimed, "Mama, these men don't have horns!" Nearby, the chaplain of the 1st Minnesota moved among the men and replied to her softly, "My dear child, these people are like your own."³⁶

In the days and weeks that followed the clash at First Manassas, the wounded Federals in the Stone House were taken to Richmond as prisoners of war. The Confederate forces continued to occupy the area until March 1862. Undoubtedly in those intervening months, the Stone House was visited as a curiosity by countless Confederate troops, local residents, and visitors from all over the South. Following the evacuation of the Centreville lines, a like procession of Northerners as well must have passed through the battlefield and stopped at the famous Stone House landmark. No doubt some of the civilians who had strained to see the battle from the heights above Centreville on July 21 finally made it to the battlefield during the spring and early summer of 1862.

It is unknown when Henry and Jane Matthews returned home and attempted to repair some of the structural damage inflicted on the Stone House during the battle fought the preceding July. A photograph of the house taken in March, 1862, however (shortly after the evacuation of the Centreville line by the Confederates), shows scaffolding on the roof, indicating the building was in the process of being re-roofed. Likewise, the same photograph shows a majority of the windows in the Stone House with broken panes, which may have been replaced during these renovations. One window appears to be boarded up, possibly indicative of the difficulty in obtaining window glass at that time.

Second Manassas

As spring turned into summer, the armies once again locked in combat in Virginia, this time on the peninsula formed by the York and James Rivers. To the residents of Prince William County, who had suffered firsthand the effects of battle less than a year earlier, this shift must have been a welcome change. However, the warm June winds brought a new Confederate commander to the peninsula. With General Robert E. Lee at the helm of his newly-named Army of Northern Virginia, the Confederate forces suddenly, unexpectedly, were on the offensive. After relieving the pressure against the Confederate capital by driving Major General George McClellan's Army of the Potomac away from Richmond, Lee began shifting troops north against Major General John Pope's newly-created Army of Virginia in the north-central part of the state. By the time McClellan's, Lee's, and Pope's armies had converged seven weeks later, Manassas once again found itself the focal point of the contending armies. And once again, the Stone House's location at a strategic intersection would ensure it would be witness to the unfolding events.

In the days leading up to the Second Battle of Manassas, the Stone House served as nothing more than a silent witness to the passing troops as they took their positions on the once and future battlefield. General William Taliaferro's Confederate division, marching north on the Sudley Road the morning of August 27, passed the Stone House on the way to their eventual position along an unfinished railroad grade near Sudley Church. Likewise, countless Federal divisions passed the Stone House on the Warrenton Turnpike and Sudley Road as they marched to their place in the line, or formed up to attack the Confederate position. The commanding general of the Federal troops himself, John Pope, established his headquarters on Buck Hill, just to the north of the Stone House, and directed (or misdirected) the battle from within sight of the now historic house.

Once the fighting began, however, the Stone House was quickly converted to its familiar role as a field hospital. Federal surgeons moved in on the morning of August 29, hung a red flag from the upper floor to identify the house as a temporary aid station, and began treating Federal wounded.³⁷ As one veteran recalled, in the Stone House "many a poor boy obtained the last glimpse of earth during those two days (29th and 30th)."³⁸

The following day, August 30, the Stone House was the scene of a flurry of activity, with Federal troops again passing the house on the way to battle and an ambulance detachment parked at the house.³⁹ Shortly after noon, as his 23rd New York moved west along the Warrenton Turnpike to join in the Federal attack against the Unfinished Railroad (the famous assault on the Deep Cut), Musician George W. Edgcomb passed the Stone House. Edgcomb's curiosity led him inside for a look at the "historic" structure. Going up to the second floor, he observed the work in the busy hospital. There he found a wounded fellow Union soldier, whose right leg had been shattered by a solid shot and subsequently had been amputated at the knee. Edgcomb gave the wounded man a drink from his canteen, then hurried on to rejoin his regiment.⁴⁰

The lull in the fighting that morning allowed the troops to gather the wounded of the previous day or hastily bury the bodies of those who had fallen. Several members of the 2nd New York Cavalry recovered the body of their lieutenant, Frederick Compton, and buried the popular officer at the corner of the Stone House, in a coffin fashioned out of cracker-boxes. Compton's remains were later recovered from the site.⁴¹

Likewise, the 22nd New York buried one of its officers in the yard of the Stone House on August 30. Several members of the unit returned to the field to recover the body of Captain Robert E. McCoy, who had been killed the previous day by two bullets to the body and one to the head. The men found Captain McCoy's body, "stripped of coat, vest, pants, sword, watch, and revolver." The captain's brother, Lieutenant James W. McCoy, fashioned a coffin (also out of cracker-boxes), in which the deceased was interred, wrapped in a blanket. The men barely completed their somber task before they were swept up in the Union retreat back to Washington.⁴²

The suddenness of the Confederate counterattack led by General James Longstreet's troops in late afternoon on August 30 sent the Federal army headlong back toward Washington, catching many of the surgeons working at the Stone House unprepared. The 23rd New York had their hospital set up at the Stone House, and the order to retreat barely gave them enough time to place those who were strong enough to be moved into ambulances. A regimental historian reported that "a number of the surgeons remained to care for those unable to be moved."⁴³

George W. Edgcomb of the 23rd New York, whose curiosity had led him into the Stone House earlier in the day, once again passed the structure as his unit retreated in the face of the Confederate countercharge. Remembering the soldier to whom he had given water, Edgcomb's curiosity again caused him to detour into the Stone House. Finding the fellow, Edgcomb learned that the wounded man was very concerned about being left behind to be captured by the Confederates. Edgcomb and another fellow "carried him down stairs and, after placing him upon a stretcher, started with our burden." In that the wounded man was rather large, and having to keep "from being run over by army wagons whose drivers were trying to get out of range of shot and shell", Edgcomb and his companion reluctantly left their wounded friend at the Stone Bridge. The

wounded man's identity was never gleaned by Edgcomb, and he later surmised that the man was "probably one of the unknown dead in a southern grave."⁴⁴

The identities of two other wounded soldiers brought to the Stone House on August 30 are not only known, but are preserved in the house itself. Two members of the 5th New York Infantry, Private Charles E. Brehm and Eugene P. Geer, arrived at the Stone House after being wounded during the late stages of the battle. Brehm had been shot in the right foot, and Geer in the groin. They were taken upstairs to the southeast room. At some point during their convalescence in the Stone House, the men carved their initials in the floorboards. Brehm carved his last name and the date: "Brehm Aug 30." Geer carved his first and middle initial, and for some unknown reason was unable to complete his last name. Thus his carving appears as "E.P. Ge." Charles Brehm was paroled on September 2 (probably at the Stone House) and spent seven months in a Washington hospital before being discharged in May, 1863. He survived more than 45 years, dying in New York City in 1909 of a variety of ailments, many of them induced by alcohol. Eugene Geer was not as lucky. He was paroled on an unknown date and place (also probably the Stone House), but was unable to overcome his wounds, to which he succumbed on September 30 at College Hospital in Georgetown.⁴⁵

Another wounded soldier thought better of stopping for aid at the Stone House, a hospital so close to the firing still going on in late afternoon. Private George F.D. Paine of the 13th Massachusetts, who had been wounded in the leg during Longstreet's attack on Chinn Ridge and was limping to the rear in an attempt to get medical treatment, noticed the Stone House and its red flag (indicative of an aid station) and started toward the structure. Before he reached his destination, however, an artillery shell struck the house, "knocking a hole that looked as big as a bushel basket" in the gable end. Deciding that perhaps there were safer places to recover, Paine kept going east on the turnpike before being assisted by an ambulance corpsman.⁴⁶

Aftermath of Second Manassas

As had been the case following the First Battle of Bull Run, the Stone House continued to be the scene of ongoing activity in the days following the second battle. For the second time in thirteen months, the Confederates held not only the battlefield at Manassas, but also hundreds of wounded Federals being treated in the numerous hospitals in the area, including the Stone House.

Many of these captured Federals would not spend time in Confederate prisons. Robert E. Lee was already considering a quick strike into the North and did not want to be encumbered with the extra work of transporting prisoners. Additionally, many of the prisons and hospitals in Richmond were still full from the casualties of the Seven Days' battles, fought just two months earlier. The Confederates decided to parole as many of the bluecoats as possible. To this end, the Stone House was set up as a parole station.

As teams of Federal surgeons returned to the battlefield to tend to the wounded under flags of truce, Confederate officers were processing the captured Northerners at the Stone House. The ambulatory wounded were taken to the Stone House, where they were paroled and sent through the lines. There they would remain, as parolees, until exchanged. One wounded New Yorker who was strong enough to walk reported being paroled "by order of General [Richard H.] Anderson" on September 2. He set out for Centreville in mid-afternoon as part of a procession that included 37 ambulances.⁴⁷ With the departure of the last of the paroled troops and ambulances, the Stone House once again became a quiet,

although historic, landmark at the intersection of the Warrenton Turnpike and the Manassas-Sudley Road.

The Stone House Since the Civil War

Though the Civil War continued for almost three years following the end of the Second Battle of Manassas, the Stone House had seen its last action of the conflict. Following the retreat of the armies, it is unclear when Henry and Jane Matthews returned to their home to once again assess the damage and repair the structure. A visitor through the area in July, 1863 recorded passing the "windowless and deserted" Stone House, which was marked by cannon shot.⁴⁸ But another traveller who passed the house on August 29 (the first anniversary of the second battle) wrote that "the new stone in the masonry show where the old ball holes once were," indicating that some repair work must have been under way at that point.⁴⁹

Regardless of when the Matthews family returned to the Stone House, it appears that the toll of having two battles fought across their property was too much for the couple. On October 3, 1865, just over three years after the second battle, Henry Matthews and his wife sold the Stone House and adjoining land to Mary A. Starbuck for the sum of \$4,000.00.⁵⁰ Little information exists regarding the house during the Starbuck ownership.

On March 4, 1879 Mary A. Starbuck deeded the Stone House to George E. Starbuck and his wife Meribah. During George's ownership, a post office was established at the Stone House. The Starbucks did not remain for very long, however, selling the property to Benson L. Pridmore barely two years later.

Despite their brief residence in the house, there were those who believed that the Starbuck's presence remained in the dwelling even after their departure. The story was told that George Starbuck put a curse on the house and the Pridmore family before he left, and that as a result of this hex, six or more of the Pridmore family "died in quick succession."⁵¹

The Pridmores and their three children lived in the Stone House for more than 20 years. With their large family requiring more bedrooms, the Pridmores partitioned the western rooms on each floor to provide more bedroom space. This is the first documented, major structural change made to the Stone House. Mr. Pridmore also made other changes to the structure and property, including the additions of a front porch, white picket fence along the front yard, and a barn on the west side of the Sudley Road.

Following Benson Pridmore's death, his heirs sold the Stone House and 165 acres to Henry J. Ayres in 1902 for \$1,600.00. Mr. Ayres would greatly develop the Stone House property and the intersection of the Warrenton Turnpike and the Manassas-Sudley Road. In March, 1903, he resumed operation of a post office at the Stone House. Also in that year he erected a wagon and carriage house, as well as a blacksmith shop. Additionally, a merchantile store was erected in 1904, which Ayres operated in partnership with a man named C.C. Lynn. To the Stone House itself, Henry Ayres added a large back porch and kitchen sometime around 1904.

Following the death of Henry Ayres in 1912; the Stone House eventually passed to his son, George Hawks Ayres and his wife Mary.⁵² Like his father before him, George Ayres made numerous developmental changes to the property. He constructed a restaurant just west of the Stone House and erected cabins on Buck Hill. These facilities were operated by the Ayres family from 1928 to 1938, at which time they were leased, and eventually sold. Ayres also

constructed a filling station on the northwest corner of the intersection. Another capital improvement project undertaken by George Ayres was the construction of a building to be used as a cheese factory, located behind the Stone House. But the project never got off the ground and the building was converted into a school bus garage.

It also appears that George Ayres may have been responsible for the most interesting additions to the Stone House - the artillery projectiles embedded in the walls of the structure. Ample photographic evidence exists to suggest that these shells, a popular feature and conversation piece of the house, were added sometime after 1912. In all likelihood, the projectiles were cemented into portions of the structure that had been damaged during the Civil War. A total of five projectiles are presently located in the walls of the Stone House. On the west side, two Parrott shells are embedded, one at the top of the chimney and another near the south attic window. A 12-pounder shot or shell is located to the immediate right of the front door on the south side of the house. Also on the south side is a Confederate Archer bolt, located below and between the second floor windows. The final projectile, another 12-pounder shot or shell, is located on the east side of the Stone House at the second floor level.⁵³

The Stone House is Acquired by the Federal Government

With the death of George Ayres in 1947, his widow sold the Stone House and the approximately 80 acres remaining in the tract to the United States government for \$42,597.00 on June 17, 1949.⁵⁴ An attempt had been made previously by the Commonwealth of Virginia to purchase the property for \$25,000.00, but the plans apparently fell through.⁵⁵

Following the acquisition of the Stone House by the Federal government, the National Park Service began an extensive stabilization and rehabilitation project on the structure. The work, contracted for \$6,565 in 1950, included a thorough renovation and modernization of the building, including reroofing the structure and the installation of new electrical and plumbing systems.⁵⁶ Following the completion of the work, the house was converted into a residence for park employees. A second, more thorough restoration project was begun by the National Park Service in 1960. The purpose of this project was to restore the Stone House to its Civil War appearance. Despite the fact that the house has undergone two major restorations, significant portions of the structure still pre-date the Civil War, including the exterior walls, the chimneys, and much of the flooring inside the house.

Today, under the protective eye of the National Park Service, the Stone House stands as a silent sentinel at the intersection of the Warrenton Turnpike and the Manassas-Sudley Road. Automobiles, tractor trailers, and schoolbuses now pass where wagons, teamsters, artillery, and soldiers once trod. In the rapidly changing and developing suburb of Washington, D.C. that Manassas has become, the Stone House stands apart as a strong, quiet reminder of the rich heritage of Northern Virginia.

Endnotes

- ¹Trowbridge, *The South: A Tour of its Battlefields and Ruined Cities*, pp. 88-89.
- ²Wilshin, *Embattled Landmark*, p. 5.
- ³*Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.
- ⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 13, 16.
- ⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 43, 46-47.
- ⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 37-61.
- ⁷For a thorough discussion on the possibilities for when and by whom the Stone House was constructed see Wilshin, *Embattled Landmark*, pp. 27-36.
- ⁸Carter, *Brothers in Blue*, p. 21; Hanson, "A Brief History of the Stone House," *Manassas Messenger*, March 5, 1948.
- ⁹Carroll, *Historic Structures Report*, pp. 9-10.
- ¹⁰Wilshin, *Embattled Landmark*, p. 33.
- ¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.
- ¹²*Ibid.*, p. 72.
- ¹³*Ibid.*, p. 67.
- ¹⁴Warner, *Generals in Gray*, p. 285.
- ¹⁵Wilshin, *Embattled Landmark*, p. 91.
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 98-100.
- ¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 110.
- ¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 112.
- ¹⁹Hennessy, *End To Innocence*, p. 47.
- ²⁰Leftwich, *Richmond Enquirer*, August 6, 1861.
- ²¹*O.R.* I, pt. 2, pp. 388-389.
- ²²Fairchild, *Record of the 27th Regiment New York Volunteers*, p. 13.
- ²³Merrell, *Five Months in Rebeldom*, p. 10.
- ²⁴*Ibid.*
- ²⁵*Ibid.*
- ²⁶*Ibid.*; *O.R.* I, pt. 2, p. 551.
- ²⁷Merrell, *Five Months in Rebeldom*, p. 10.
- ²⁸Roe, *The Fifth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry*, pp. 73-74.
- ²⁹Memorandum of Henry M. Binney to Col. Lawrence, July 25, 1861.
- ³⁰Merrell, *Five Months in Rebeldom*, p. 12.
- ³¹*O.R.* I, pt. 2, p. 551.
- ³²Merrell, *Five Months in Rebeldom*, p. 12. "Portici," the wartime home of the Frank Lewis family, was used as a headquarters by Confederate Joseph E. Johnston during the battle.
- ³³For a detailed discussion of the identities of the men, see Burgess, *Stone House Interpreter's Reference Manual*, p. I-14.
- ³⁴*Richmond Examiner*, August 1, 1861.
- ³⁵*Richmond Enquirer*, July 26, 1861.
- ³⁶Haries, "Gainesville, Virginia, August 28, 1862," p. 158.
- ³⁷Paine, "How I Left Bull Run Battlefield," p. 32.
- ³⁸Lyon, *Cedar Mountain to Bull Run*, p. 28.
- ³⁹*Appendix to Part I of the Medical and Surgical History of the Rebellion*, p. 115.
- ⁴⁰Edgcomb, "War Time Incident Recalled," Edgcomb family scrapbook.
- ⁴¹Meyer, Henry C., *Civil War Experiences*, p. 15.
- ⁴²"The 22nd New York," *National Tribune*, September 24, 1885.
- ⁴³Maxson, *Campfires of the Twenty-third*, p. 192.
- ⁴⁴Edgcomb, "War Time Incident Recalled," *The Standard*.
- ⁴⁵Burgess, *Stone House Interpreter's Manual*, p. III-3.
- ⁴⁶Paine, "How I Left Bull Run Battlefield," pp. 32-33.
- ⁴⁷Rathbun, "Civil War Diary," p. 341.
- ⁴⁸Benedict, *Army Life in Virginia*, p. 155.
- ⁴⁹Unsigned letter from 155th New York, dated August 29, 1863.
- ⁵⁰Wilshin, *Embattled Landmark*, p. A-2.
- ⁵¹Carter, *Four Brothers in Blue*, p. 21.
- ⁵²George Hawkes Ayres was the nephew and namesake of Stonewall Jackson's commissary officer, Major Wells J. Hawkes. In the delirium just prior to his death, Jackson called out for Hawkes immediately before uttering his final words. Wilshin, *Embattled Landmark*, p. 293; Chambers, *Stonewall Jackson*, p. 446.
- ⁵³Burgess, *Stone House Interpreter's Reference Manual*, p. 5.
- ⁵⁴Wilshin, *Embattled Landmark*, p. A-38.
- ⁵⁵Hanson, "A Brief History of the Stone House," *Manassas Messenger*, March 5, 1948.
- ⁵⁶Wilshin, *Embattled Landmark*, pp. 295-310.



The Stone House as it appeared in March, 1862, following the evacuation of the area by the Confederate army.



The effects of the First Battle of Manassas are evident in this photograph of the Stone House. Note the broken window panes, boarded-up window, and debris-strewn yard. Also of interest is the scaffolding on the roof; the Stone House was being reroofed when this photograph was taken in March, 1862.

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