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Ellicott City B&O museum to be under new management

By Mike Santa Rita, Columbia Flyer, December 15, 2005

The B&O Railroad Museum in Baltimore will take over management of the railroad museum in Ellicott City in February, Howard County officials said.

The Baltimore-based museum will close the B&O Railroad Station Museum in Ellicott City for more than a month to install improvements. It will reopen the local museum with expanded hours March 10.

Howard County's Department of Recreation and Parks reached an agreement with the B&O Railroad Museum - one of the nation's largest and best-known rail museums - to manage the county-owned facility on Main Street in late November.

Under the agreement, the county will pay the Baltimore-based museum \$50,000 annually to manage the Ellicott City facility, said John Byrd, the county's bureau chief for parks and program services.

The County Council approved the agreement Dec. 5, Byrd said.

The Baltimore museum will assume management of the Ellicott City facility Feb. 1. Until then, the museum will be managed by Historic Ellicott City Inc., a local preservation group that has managed the museum for more than 30 years.

The management change is part of a project county officials launched in 2000 to restore or assume management of all the 16 historic sites it owns in Howard.

The agreement stipulates that the railroad museum will participate in the Ellicott City Consortium, a group of six county-owned historic sites in Ellicott City that officials have

conjoined in an effort to share programming and boost tourism, Byrd said.

In reaching the management agreement, county officials noted "the fact that the B&O Baltimore museum is sort of the mother of B&O history and the Ellicott City station is the first terminus of the original line out of Baltimore," Byrd said. "There's a natural continuity with the interpretation of the railroad."

New exhibits, longer hours

Officials of the Baltimore museum will install new exhibits in the Ellicott City building, said Courtney Wilson, executive director of the Baltimore museum.

Officials also will expand the museum's operation from three to five days a week, Wilson said.

Built in 1831, the Ellicott City station was the first terminus of the B&O Railroad, the first railroad in the United States. It consists of the original stone passenger station, an 1885 structure that was used to transfer freight and a 1927 B&O caboose.

Because of its history, the local museum will focus on exhibits concentrating on the early era of the railroad, from 1830 up to and including the Civil War, Wilson said.

"The B&O was at the center of the Civil War and, in fact, historians have called the B&O railroad 'Mr. Lincoln's railroad,'" he added.

In addition to the \$50,000 annual grant it will receive from the county, the museum intends to spend about \$50,000 of its own money annually to operate the Ellicott City facility, Wilson said.

He added that he is negotiating with officials of Historic Ellicott City Inc. to allow the museum to keep some items the preservation group owns, including a small library and archive,

and original artifacts related to the railroad.



Photo courtesy B&O Railroad Museum

McPherson Barn Door Brings \$9775

By Robert Kyle, Maine Antique Digest, December 20, 2005

A 19th-century barn door riddled with bullet holes brought \$9775 (including buyer's premium) at the J.C. Devine firearms auction on October 16 in Milford, New Hampshire.

This was not just any barn door shot up one Saturday night. This door once graced an entrance to a large barn on the McPherson farm in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The barn had become a sanctuary for some of the over 8000 soldiers wounded on the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg, July 1, 1863.

In the morning the Union forces occupied the farm. When Confederate forces attacked, Yankee wounded were placed in the barn. When Southern soldiers forced a Northern retreat, the McPherson farm fell into Rebel hands. They too used the barn to shelter their wounded. The barn became a field hospital for both sides. The wooden door was acquired in 1927 by the Shields Museum in Gettysburg. When the private museum closed in 1985, the door was purchased by the consignor who placed it in Devine's auction. The



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door's estimate of \$5000/10,000 proved accurate.

The door measures 65½" x 36" and is made from two wide planks. It contains at least 23 bullet holes. The winning bidder lives in Pennsylvania.



An Photo courtesy J.C. Devine formerly displayed at the Officers Museum is a Confederate brown wool blanket found on Fordney Ridge after the Gettysburg battle. Sold folded in a glass display case, it brought \$4600 (est. \$2000/3000). A pair of Union trousers, with no apparent connection to Gettysburg, also sold for \$4600 (est. \$4000/ 6000).

Va. Family Donates Relic to Ford's Theatre

Chair Was Removed From Lincoln's Box after Assassination

By *Petula Dvorak*, Washington Post, December 12, 2005

Inside the box at Ford's Theatre where President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, most of the furnishings are carefully chosen replicas: the heavy gold drapes and tassels, the red, gold and white floral carpet, the presidential rocker.

But last week, the National Park Service got hold of the real thing. A carved-back, cane-seat parlor chair that was in the presidential box the night Lincoln was shot by actor John Wilkes Booth -- perhaps the one Mary Todd Lincoln was sitting in -- was donated to the government by a Virginia family that had kept the artifact for 140 years.

"This is a fabulous thing we've been given. We're very excited about it," said Gloria Swift, the Park Service's curator for Ford's Theatre.

After the assassination darkened the theater in 1865, the government bought the structure on 10th Street NW and turned it into a three-story office building. One of the workers dismantling the theater claimed that his boss had told him to take anything he wanted out of the presidential box. He removed the parlor chair and gave it to the Virginia family, where it was handed down for generations, Swift said.

The family, which Swift said has asked to remain anonymous, tried to sell the chair to the Park Service in the 1950s, when the theater box was being reconditioned as a historic site. But the agency didn't have the cash to buy it and made a replica instead, Swift said.

The current matriarch of the family told the Park Service recently that ownership of the chair was weighing on her.

"All her friends told her she is crazy, that she should sell it on eBay," Swift said. "But she said that giving it to us felt like the right thing to do."

Historians checked the chair for authenticity; the age, markings, style, material and documentation all checked out. And it perfectly matches the chair that Mary Lincoln is sitting on, as well as one empty chair, in a sketch of the assassination in Frank

Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, the period's paper of record.

The chair was put back in the box last week and can be viewed from behind plexiglass on tours of the theater or during performances. It was reunited with two other authentic pieces from that night -- a tufted settee and a portrait of George Washington.

The crown jewel of that tableau, however, remains out of reach for Swift.

"We'd love to have the rocker that President Lincoln was sitting in," she said, sighing. That chair, seized as evidence by the U.S. War Department for the conspirators' trials, was returned in 1921 to the family who owned the theater, then sold in an auction to Henry Ford (who is no relation to the theater Fords).

It remains in the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Mich.

"Our replica is pretty good, though," Swift said.



Photo by Gloria Swift



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Battlefield at Brandy Station saved from developer

*Fredricksburg, VA Free Lance-Star
12/14/2005*

By DONNIE JOHNSTON

The Brandy Station Foundation disclosed on December 13 that it is purchasing 18.9 acres of battlefield land that had been slated to become a housing development.

The parcel was the subject of a court fight earlier this year in which the Civil War preservationist group sought an injunction to prevent Golden Oaks Construction from building on the property just south of State Route 685 in Culpeper County.

In early February, a judge refused to issue the injunction prohibiting Golden Oaks owner Clifton Schull from building several houses on the land. Schull had obtained a permit in January to build a single-family dwelling on the property.

Schull, however, agreed to negotiate with the Brandy Station Foundation and asked \$1 million for the land in March. The BSF had offered him \$540,000 in June of 2004, less than two months after Schull acquired it from Wayne Stillwell for \$450,000.

Bob Luddy, president of the Brandy Station Foundation, said late yesterday that his group paid \$560,000 for the parcel, which is at the base of Fleetwood Heights and was the scene of heavy fighting during the June 9, 1863, Battle of Brandy Station.

The land will now be protected from residential or commercial development. It becomes part of several BSF holdings in the area, including an adjacent parcel.

The Civil War Preservation Trust owns more than 1,500 acres of the Brandy Station battlefield.

In a news release issued yesterday, the BSF said "the necessary funding was obtained through a complicated program of grants and donations with the largest donor being the Virginia Land Conservation Trust." Other contributors included the Civil War Preservation Trust and "an anonymous private donor from outside of Culpeper County."

The foundation also disclosed that it secured a loan at a local bank to help with the purchase.

Final arrangements were expected to be worked out this morning and a formal purchase announcement is scheduled for 3:30 this afternoon at the Brandy Station site.

Historic Fredericksburg farm is on the market

By GEORGE WHITEHURST,
Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star,
January 3, 2006

The Pierson Farm is now up for sale.

The family of the late landowner, John W. Pierson, is asking \$12.3 million for the property, which is near Shannon Airport. Its more than 200 acres are zoned for light industrial and commercial use.

But in December 1862, the land was torn asunder as Union and Confederate forces clashed during the Battle of Fredericksburg.

As a result, officials with the Civil War Preservation Trust and the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust are salivating over the property.

CWPT spokesman Jim Campi describes the ground as "really blood-soaked." Conservative estimates suggest as many as 2,500 men were killed or wounded in a few hours on the parcel, leading soldiers at the time to nickname it "Slaughter Pen Farm."

Campi adds that the property offers valuable clues on the outcome of the Battle of Fredericksburg.

"What most people know about the Battle of Fredericksburg was the fighting at Marye's Heights, which was a very one-sided affair," he said. "But in many ways, the battle was determined on and near the Slaughter Pen Farm. Unlike in front of Marye's Heights, the fighting on Slaughter Pen was very touch-and-go, and both sides suffered tremendous casualties."

Working in tandem, the two trusts have made an offer to Pierson's family.

Campi was tight-lipped about the details, other than to describe it as a "multimillion dollar offer" that would involve state and federal grants, private money and some state tax incentives. He offered a cautiously optimistic appraisal of the family's reaction.

"I think there is an interest in seeing the farm preserved, and they're considering their options," he said.

But Alex Long with Weichert Realty, who is listing the property, described the preservationists' current offer as "deficient" and "insufficient."

Nevertheless, he said Pierson's family is receptive to the groups' overtures.

"In all honesty, we'll try to work with them, but cooperation is a two-way street," Long said. "If it becomes shrill and nasty on the other side, that cooperation can be taken off the table as easily as it was put on the table. In the final analysis, it's a balancing of interests."

Donald Pfan, a staff historian with the National Park Service, just hopes that the scale tips in favor of preservation.

He notes that most portions of the Fredericksburg Battlefield--Marye's



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Union Zoaves fight on Pierson's farm – photo courtesy Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star

Heights, Prospect Hill, Lee's Hill-- have been developed or become heavily wooded.

"In my judgment, [the Pierson Farm] is extremely important because it is the only spot left on the Fredericksburg Battlefield where you can stand and look across a wide expanse and say, 'This is substantially what it looked like in 1862,'" he said. "That land has not changed much in 140 years. Nowhere else on the battlefield can you stand today and make that statement."

But the clock is ticking for the preservationists.

Long said the land has generated several inquiries since its public listing, but said officials from Shannon Airport haven't contacted him.

Spotsylvania Supervisor Vince Onorato, in whose district the farm falls, hopes to see the land preserved.

"I'm hopeful the landowner will do the right thing and sell it to the CVBT or to CWPT, but there's really not anything I can do to influence that," he said recently.

Though the Pierson Farm abuts land already owned by the agency, it falls outside the boundaries of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park.

Unless Congress places the farm within the boundary, the Park Service can't buy or even accept a donation of the land.

John Hennessy, chief historian of the local park, hopes preservation groups can "work out some sort of fate for the property that includes a preservation component, if not wholesale preservation."

"There's hardly a piece of property in the Fredericksburg region that's been subject to as much attention by preservation groups as the Pierson Farm," he said.

Developer has contract to buy historic Morris Island

CHARLESTON, S.C. --AP- December 23, 2005

Conservationists are again balking at the idea of development on Morris Island, a barrier island that was the site of a Civil War battle involving

black troops of the 54th Massachusetts regiment.

The island - more than 800 acres with just 125 of those above tidal fluctuations and fewer than 70 acres deemed suitable for construction - is under contract to Florida developer Ginn Co.

While officials with Ginn say they haven't any specific plans for the island, local government officials say the company wants to build a 10-bedroom bed and breakfast.

"Preserving Morris Island is a top priority for legions of organizations and individuals in both the public and private sectors," Blake Hallman, chairman of the Morris Island Coalition, said in a news release Thursday. "In the spirit of the holidays, I hope the property owner will allow us a chance to put together a viable offer, saving this land and its historic character forever."

The island is owned by a partnership known as Lowcountry Lands.

South Carolina developer Harry Huffman had development rights to develop the island and tried to sell those rights on eBay last year for \$12.5 million.

Ginn put in an offer for the island almost immediately after Huffman's rights expired this summer, according to Jim Campi, spokesman for the Civil War Preservation Trust.

"We thought we finally had a chance" to buy the island, Campi said. "We've been talking with state, federal and local officials, and there really is a desire to purchase the island."

Ginn has a contract to buy the property, with closing scheduled for late January, said company spokesman Ryan Julison. But Julison denied the company had plans for a bed and breakfast on the island.

Ginn is owned by South Carolina native Bobby Ginn. The Celebration,



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Fla.-based company has developed or managed properties such as Hammock Beach and Yacht Harbor Village near St. Augustine, Fla., and Mahogany Run Golf Course in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Its South Carolina projects include Cobblestone Park in Blythewood near Columbia and Belvidere Club and Resort in Mount Pleasant.

"These people are smart and have lots of money," said Nora Kravec, a member of the Morris Island Coalition, formed to protect the island.

Even if the company were planning just one or two houses or a small development, preservationists don't want to see anything built on the island.

"Our history records few deeds of valor more heroic than the charge of the 54th Massachusetts on the ramparts of Fort Wagner," said James Lighthizer, president of the Civil War Preservation Trust. "The scene of such gallantry should be preserved to inspire all Americans, not transformed into a resort for a select few."

Delaware Museum chosen to repair Beauvoir artifacts

WINTERTHUR, Del. December 20, 2005, Philadelphia Enquirer

The gloved staff in Winterthur Museum's restoration lab painstakingly sliced off the binding tape and, careful not to get a snoot full of mold, lifted off the bubble pack. Then - carefully, carefully - they turned the painting over.

"Wow."

"Geez."

"She must have been slammed into something."

Above a gash in the canvas, 27-year-old Winnie Davis, youngest child of Jefferson Davis, daughter of the Confederacy, gazed serenely across time, her image having survived from the 19th century to the 20th to the 21st.

Winnie's portrait - from 1892, when she was a queen of Mardi Gras - hung above a mantel at Beauvoir, the Mississippi estate of the Confederate president.

But on Aug. 29, a 30-foot wall of water from the Gulf of Mexico roared up the Biloxi beach, across a two-lane highway, and straight through Beauvoir - French for "beautiful view." Winnie's portrait was among untold amounts of irreplaceable artwork and artifacts that were damaged or lost at museums and historical properties during Katrina.

Now, with the help of grants, some of those treasures are going to Winterthur, near Wilmington, Del., to be restored under a new partnership between the decorative-arts museum, the University of Delaware's art conservation program, Beauvoir, and a Biloxi pottery museum.

Debra Hess Norris, chair of the university's art conservation department, had been to the coast as part of a small delegation that assessed cultural damage. She returned home vowing to do more.

About the same time, Winterthur staffers were trying to figure out how to volunteer their help. They decided to team up and focus on two institutions.

The first Delaware team went south in late September to do conservation work and see what could be taken back.

The losses were "just staggering," said Jennifer Mass, Winterthur senior scientist and project director.

Five of Beauvoir's seven buildings had disappeared, swept from their foundations. Artifacts were washed across 55 acres and a bayou, joined by debris from a Denny's restaurant and suburban homes.

Stepping gingerly atop the refuse, workers could go 200 yards or more without seeing ground. Little by little, they began to find objects.

A bulldozer operator alerted Mark Anderson, Winterthur furniture conservator, to an item that turned out to be Jefferson Davis' lap desk - in pieces.

The workers began to recover rusted muskets and sabers, but of what vintage? Reproductions from the gift shop had also washed outside. It was difficult to tell them from the originals. In most museum disasters - a sprinkler break, say - conservators start instant artifact triage, deciding what needs to be done in 24 hours, in 48, in 72. Here, artifacts had rusted and moldered for weeks. And more turned up every day.

"How do you prioritize?" wondered Margaret Little, Winterthur objects conservator.

The mourning dress of Davis' wife is in tatters. All that's left of his Senate chair - in those days, senators took them when they left office - is one brass caster.

The nearby Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art, designed by Frank Gehry, was crushed by a floating casino. Its collection of pottery by George Ohr, the "mad potter of Biloxi," had been packed to protect it from Katrina, but books, paintings and furniture were sodden.

Ohr director of exhibitions Anna Stanfield, an art historian by training, did not have the expertise to deal with all the mold.



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"We were desperate," she said, until some of the nation's top conservators showed up.

Patrick Hotard, Beauvoir's executive director, considers the university and Winterthur "a godsend. To have a facility of that caliber essentially adopt us ... we're just pleased beyond measure."

Dealing with such massive destruction is "taxing on a person's spirit," said Hotard, who lives in a Federal Emergency Management Agency trailer at Beauvoir, his home having washed away.

But you don't just give up on a national historic landmark. Beauvoir aims to reopen June 3, 2008, the 200th anniversary of Davis' birth.

Winnie Davis' portrait, 42 by 67 inches, was still hanging after the water receded, but the high-water mark is nearly to the ceiling, Hotard said.

That portrait and two others are "just the beginning," Norris said.

At a table in Winterthur's lab, Joyce Hill Stoner, a Delaware art conservation professor, bent over the portrait of a bearded Jeff Davis and dabbed it with a chemical to "consolidate" the cracked and curling paint. Katrina had washed it to the Beauvoir parlor floor.

It had taken the staff 2 hours just to unpack it. Part of the canvas was loose, and if it sagged too much, the paint would pop off.

Both paintings have been scraped and partially obscured by a milky crust of ruined varnish. "They look like they've been sandblasted," Mass said.

Winnie's portrait is slathered with mud and bulges from debris wedged behind the canvas. Stoner often finds bug carcasses and pine needles - fallen from holiday garlands - stuffed behind artwork. Here she expects to

find mud, sand, plaster dust and more.

The challenge in restoring the paintings, as for many objects, is that their documentation has been lost. Reams of papers that detail the museum's collection were fused by the floodwater.

In a lab that Winterthur staffers think of as "CSI" meets "Antiques Roadshow," they will use spectrometers and microscopes and chromatographs to test paint and varnish.

This will tell them what's in the paint - lead or copper, for instance, walnut oil or linseed - and what chemicals they can use without doing harm.

They will remove discolored varnish with thousands of solvent-soaked swabs, painstakingly rubbing tiny sections of canvas. They will fill scrapes with special putty and then "inpaint."

As Stoner inspected Winnie's portrait, she realized to her dismay that it had been damaged and repaired once before. But how? And with what? She shook her head and reconsidered her estimate of a year or more to restore the painting. "Make that 2 1/2 years," she said.



Varina Anne (Winnie) Davis -
Courtesy Rice University

New Orleans Confederate Memorial Hall to Reopen Saturday

Jan. 3, 2006-CWi-Confederate Memorial Hall Museum in New Orleans is reopening on Saturday, January 7, Board member Sam Hood has advised.

"Initially, the museum will be open only Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, from 10:00 AM-4:00 PM," Hood said in an email.

Confederate Memorial Hall is the largest repository of Civil War Confederate artifacts outside of the Confederate White House and museum in Richmond, Virginia. It was the site where the only president of the Confederate State of America, Jefferson Davis, lay in state after his death in 1889.

Davis lived in New Orleans, or his nearby home of Beauvoir in Biloxi, Mississippi, after the war. Beauvoir suffered extensive damage from Katrina and the nearby Jefferson Davis Presidential Museum was severely affected as well.

After Hurricane Katrina and the flooding which followed the storm it was difficult to find out the status of historic sites such as Memorial Hall. Several waves of rumors suggested it might have been damaged by either water or vandals, but aside from minor damage caused by the storm itself the structure and contents were unmolesated.

Artifacts held in the museum include numerous regimental flags, relics relating to Jefferson Davis and his family, and innumerable items donated by veterans of the Civil War in their later years, or by their families after the veterans' deaths. Uniforms, swords, medals, documents and other papers make up much of the collection.