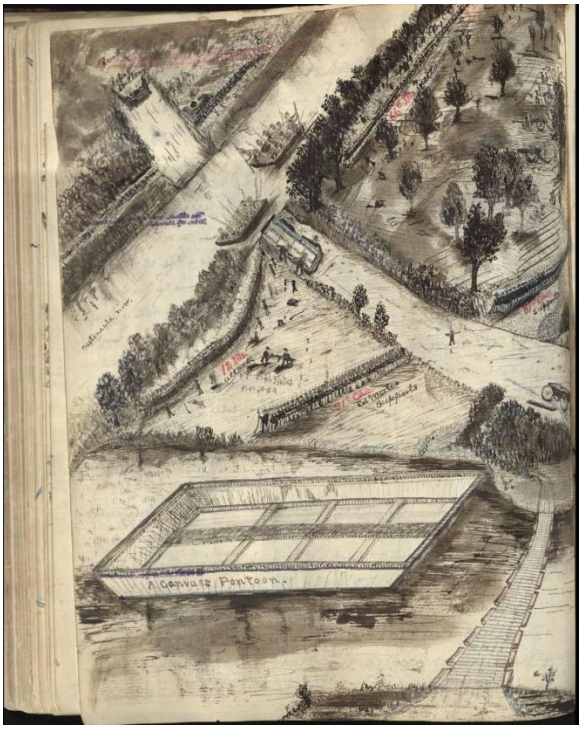
Just Seventeen and Under Fire at Resaca

Tony Patton, April 14, 2025, blueandgrayeducation.org



Sketch of Snake Creek Gap and pontoon crossing at Lay's Ferry, from diary of Arminius Bill | Connecticut Digital Archive Collections

Pvt. Arminius Bill of Sheffield, Illinois, was just 17 when he volunteered for service in Company C of the 14th Missouri Infantry, later designated the 66th Illinois Infantry. They were better known as the Western Sharpshooters—or, more colloquially, the Squirrel Tail Regiment.

On May 15, 1864, Private Bill was part of a detachment attempting to flank the Confederates from their entrenched position at Resaca, Georgia.

Located in Gordon County, just north of Calhoun, Resaca marked the first all-out battle between Union and Confederate forces during Sherman's Atlanta Campaign. The two-day affair resulted in more than 7,000 casualties.

On the 14th, as day one of the battle drew to a close, Sherman ordered Gen. Thomas W. Sweeny's division be detached from General McPherson's Army of the Tennessee. Their mission: to maneuver around the stubborn Confederate forces. The chosen location for the flanking movement was Lay's Ferry on the Oostanaula River. It was guarded by a detachment of Confederate cavalry from Gen. William T. Martin's division, along with a battery of artillery.

Gen. William T. Martin | LOC

Upon arrival, the Federals were tasked with assembling a pontoon bridge to cross past the left—or western—flank of Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's Confederate army. Private Bill wrote:

"A Pontoon train comes up and by 5 p.m. their boats are ready to put down. Several companies of our regt. with their rifles are sent with the engineers to help lay the pontoons ... as the men with the pontoons approached the bank. ... the rebel force opposite opened a furious fire of artillery and musketry ... men got in and tried to cross: but the canvas sides were so quickly & completely perforated with bullets that the boats would fill and sink. One boat having 18 of the 81st Ohio men in it, had every man killed or wounded that the boat floated down stream and was caught by some bushes on our side, so that it could be hauled ashore, the men rescued."

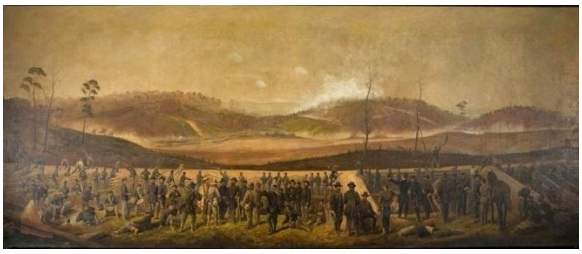
Continuing, Private Bill wrote about his personal heroic action that day.

"I found that one of our batteries on a hill in the cotton fields cut its fuse so short that its shells burst in our regiment instead of going across the field & river to burst among the rebels. I got the range of the guns, and placed myself between the line

of fire—then ran back up the hill as rapidly as possible. Two shells passed me like shrieking demons—but I got up there and stepped out of the smoke of the discharge yelling to the sergeant at the gun that he was killing our men. The Captain came forward and took my statement and started timing his shells longer thereafter. So I hope I did some good this day..."

The crossing was ultimately successful. After nightfall on the 15th, Johnston stealthily withdrew, leaving behind only a line of skirmishers in the fortifications around Resaca.

"The position at Resaca was, therefore, flanked, Johnston's communications threatened. The bloody Battle of Resaca was thus decided by a heavy skirmish several miles away," as noted on the Resaca Battlefield State Historic Site website.



"Battle of Resaca" by James Walker, from circa 1870s | public domain

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The Devil's Punchbowl

John M. Taylor and Norman Dasinger, Jr., March 31, 2025, blueandgrayeducation.org

Devil's Punchbowl produces some of Mississippi's juiciest peaches, but locals refuse to eat them, based on its harrowing history. | public domain

Following the Union Army's conquest of the Mississippi River Valley in 1863, thousands of formerly enslaved people and destitute white refugees fled plantations and farms in a desperate bid for survival. Many sought refuge in Natchez, Mississippi, hoping the Union occupiers would offer protection and security. Some estimates suggest the population of Natchez surged from 10,000 to as many as 120,000 during this time, overwhelming the city's limited resources and making survival a daily struggle—especially for the newly freed.

A Natchez Democrat article dated June 17, 2022, described the situation: "As runaway slaves flocked to where the Union army was, they were seeking freedom behind Union lines. That meant thousands of former slaves flocked to Vicksburg, Natchez, Port Hudson, all along the Mississippi. The Union army had no policy at the time for how to deal with the thousands of formerly enslaved people who were arriving in droves. Natchez had a huge influx of self-emancipated enslaved persons, and the Union was not equipped to handle that, so they established refugee camps."

Branded as "contrabands" (a term implying they were illegally held property), many of these individuals were confined to what is now known as the Devil's Punchbowl—a deep, wooded ravine shaped like a natural bowl. By 1864, all "idle Negroes" were ordered into this camp. A decree published in the Weekly National Intelligencer on April 28, 1864, read:

"It is hereby ordered that after the 1st Day of April, 1864, no contraband shall be allowed to remain in the city of Natchez, who is not employed by some responsible White person. … All contrabands in the city in contravention of this order … will be removed to the contraband encampment."

A stereoscope photograph of the Devil's Punchbowl in Natchez, Mississippi, circa 1900 | (Norman C. Henry/New York Public Library Digital Collections)

A WJTV News Channel 12 report from Jackson, Mississippi, described the Devil's Punchbowl as "a place where, during the Civil War, authorities forced tens of thousands of freed slaves to live in concentration camps

However, some historians claim that the term "concentration camp" may not be entirely accurate. In a June 17, 2023, journalist Marquise Francis noted, "As squalid as the conditions were for refugees in Natchez, this was not a concentration camp (with all that is implied by that term)."

According to the late Don Estes, former director of Natchez City Cemetery—and a source the author personally knew—"The camp was at the bottom of a hollow pit with trees on the bluffs above. … Over 20,000 freed slaves were killed in one year." Though the true death toll remains uncertain, historian Ron Davis, professor emeritus at

California State University, wrote in The Black Experience in Natchez that “The main refugee camp in Natchez contained as many as 4,000 refugees in the summer of 1863. … In the fall of 1863, 2,000 had already perished.”

The Natchez Democrat added, “The people in the contraband camps suffered disease because of the overcrowding and poor sanitation, as well as from drinking Mississippi River water … they had mass deaths—daily deaths.”

Although some Union soldiers expressed concern for the refugees, many did not. Researcher Paula Westbrook told WJTV, “The Union Army did not allow them to remove the bodies from the camp. They just gave ’em shovels and said bury ’em where they drop.”

To this day, the Devil’s Punchbowl remains a haunting symbol of this chapter in history. The ravine is known for producing some of the region’s most beautiful peaches—yet locals refuse to eat them, based on the sordid history of the area and recognition that the original “fertilizer” was from the deterioration of human flesh.

As past stories are retold and recent research emerges, The Natchez Democrat aptly observed: “The myth of the Devil’s Punchbowl mixes fact and fiction.”

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The Last Witness to Appomattox

Norman Dasinger, Jr., March 28, 2025, blueandgrayeducation.org

Pleasant Riggs Crump observed Lee's surrender at the McLean House in Appomattox Court House from across the road. | NPS

In a quiet cemetery near Lincoln, Alabama, lies Pleasant Riggs Crump, believed to be the last living witness to one of the most defining moments in American history: the surrender of Robert E. Lee to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, on April 9 and 10, 1865.

Born in 1847 in St Clair County, Alabama, Crump—known simply as “Riggs” to those who knew him—traveled to Petersburg, Virginia, in 1864 to enlist in Company A of the 10th Alabama Infantry Regiment of the Confederate States Army. Many of the men in the 10th hailed from Crump’s home region, and by the time he joined, the unit had already witnessed the death and misery of the Civil War in the Eastern Theater. Crump arrived just in time to participate in the Battle of Hatcher's Run, Virginia, and the siege of Petersburg.

When General Lee decided to end the bloodshed, Crump and the 10th Alabama were with the Army of Northern Virginia at

Appomattox. Reflecting on that moment years later, Crump wrote that he stood “just across the road from the McLean House … and took his little part in the stacking of the arms."

More than just a witness, Crump has also been recognized by some historians in recent years as the last documented surviving Confederate soldier. He passed away in 1951 at the remarkable age of 104.

After the war, Crump returned home and married Mary Hall. Following her death in 1901, he married Ella Wallis. According to The Anniston Star (May 5, 2006 edition), Crump applied for a Confederate veteran’s pension in 1915 and received a check until his death. “He continued to work on his farm until after World War II.” He served as a deacon of Refuge Baptist Church for 71 years.

His obituary noted that President Harry S. Truman honored him with the ceremonial title of "Colonel." In The South's Last Boys in Gray by Jay Hoar, family members remembered Crump fondly:

"Mr. Crump was active all his life. He loved pies and cakes and meat. He smoked his pipe all the time. … He liked to do things and had a sound mind as long as he lived."

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Two Centuries Ago, Batteaumen on Virginia’s James River Ended Long Work Days With a Taste of Freedom

The James River Batteau Company, an outdoor recreation-meets-historical tour business, has designed a dinner cruise that honors the resilience and culinary ingenuity of enslaved boatmen

A batteau is a flat-bottomed vessel, a wooden relic of the 18th century that once carried tobacco, iron and flour through Virginia. Courtesy of the James River Batteau Company

Kinsey Gidick, Smithsonian Magazine, April 10, 2025

As the sun dips softly behind the Blue Ridge Mountains, the James River unfurls like a ribbon of gold, cradling the reflection of a passing batteau. The flat-bottomed vessel, a wooden relic of the 18th century, glides through the water. Onboard, the air is laced with the scent of fire-kissed trout and simmering asparagus, a fragrant echo of suppers shared along these waters two centuries ago.

Between 1775 and 1840, hundreds of extraordinary watermen—enslaved, freed and poor white—poled flotillas of tobacco (as many as 11 hogsheads, or 11,000 pounds, according to Thomas Jefferson's diary), iron and flour from the Piedmont of central Virginia to market in the colonial and then state capital, Richmond. Their calloused hands navigated hundreds of boats through the river's curves, muscles straining against the current with each push of the pole.

"Imagine this river at two feet and bringing a boat with 10,000 pounds of tobacco on it," says Will Smith, co-owner of James River Batteau Company, an outdoor recreation-meets-historical tour business based in Scottsville, Virginia. "These people played an incredible role in building Virginia into the powerhouse it was in that era."

Will Smith is a co-owner of James River Batteau Company. "I practically grew up on a batteau," he says. Courtesy of the James River Batteau Company

In modern Virginia, trains and semi trucks dominate the transport routes, but back then, this 348-mile tributary was the state's lifeline—a liquid superhighway propelled by the labor of marginalized men. Shackled by bondage or poverty, they powered the prosperity of a young nation with every stroke. Yet, each evening brought a brief respite—a promise of dinner and a momentary escape from the day's hardships.

"We know they ate a lot of ashcakes and things that would go directly into the fire made on the boats," says Will Cash, James River Batteau Company's other co-owner. "That and salt-cured bacon."

It's these meals that the Amherst, Virginia, natives honor with Farm to Batteau, a unique voyage held on their own replica batteaux offered from May through October. This immersive tour invites passengers to step back in time, experiencing the river as those early watermen did, complete with simple, hearty flavors reminiscent of a bygone era.

Weighing the risks of the job

By the early 1800s, the movement of commodities throughout central Virginia was almost entirely dependent on batteaux. A typical crew of three navigated these long, narrow boats from sunrise to sunset down the James River in favorable weather. "They generally required more men to get back upstream, especially when loaded," Smith says. "We have some accounts of the upriver crewing being five to six men and others where there were as many as nine."

The shallow draft—often less than two feet—allowed batteaux to traverse the river

even during near-drought conditions. But this same feature posed a challenge, as the boat's low clearance demanded precision and strength from the crew, especially given its length of 70 feet. To maneuver, boatmen had to use lengthy oars called sweeps to push from both ends, securing a hold in the often slippery riverbed. The most accomplished of sailors ascended to the role of headman and were in charge of piloting the vessels through rapids and whitewater.

Smith and Will Cash (above) launched the James River Batteau Company in 2022, offering tours aboard their replica batteau, the Morning Dew. Courtesy of the James River Batteau Company

"River commerce always had seasonal fluctuations, and the water level would have often been more of a factor than the month," explains Smith. "Given the unpredictable nature of the water level, plantations would send more boats when the water was up. During late summer, when the water was low, the crews often had to take half-loads or even wait for rain to make the trip. Batteaux would also travel in the winter when conditions permitted—river ice was a real problem."

How much boatmen earned for this work remains a mystery. "We don't have evidence of exactly how they were paid," Smith adds. "I presume it was either in currency, tobacco or another crop they could trade themselves." Whatever the amount, it likely wasn't equal to the work being done.

According to Smith and Cash, numerous accounts detail batteaumen getting trapped in rapids, frantically bailing water and helplessly watching as hogsheads of tobacco were claimed by the turbulent current. Short of that, Bruce Terrell, author of The James River Batteau: Tobacco Transport in the Upland Virginia, 1745-1840, writes that "often, the crew had to jump into the water and lift the vessel with brute strength."

One of the most tragic incidents occurred in January 1854, when Frank Padget, an enslaved man navigating a batteau, lost his life attempting to rescue several men from a James River canal boat that had plunged over a dam near Balcony Falls. Today, a historical marker near Glasgow, Virginia—commissioned and funded by Captain Edward Echols, who witnessed the disaster—commemorates Padget's bravery.

However, the dominance of the batteau did not last. The development of the James River and Kanawha Canal, which began operating in 1821, swiftly followed by the advent of the Richmond and Alleghany Railroad, made batteaux obsolete. Despite this shift, the economic advantage that batteaux offered at their peak, over the laborious and costly practice of rolling

hogshead barrels overland to market, was undeniable.

A typical crew of three navigated these long, narrow boats from sunrise to sunset down the James River in favorable weather. Joe Austin Photography/Alamy

According to Terrell, the introduction of batteaux had a profound impact on the tobacco trade, significantly boosting exports to England and Scotland. Between 1761-1765 and 1771-1775, tobacco exports surged by 40 percent, reaching approximately 102 million pounds per year. For wealthy planters like Thomas Jefferson, sending men down the river was worth the risk.

Reviving history on the James River

If not for an extraordinary archaeological find in the 1980s, this brief chapter of river history might have remained a mere footnote.

In 1983, scientist William E. Trout III and classical musician James Moore III made an astonishing discovery at what was once the commercial heart of 19th-century Richmond. In a vast pit near Shockoe Slip, where the Great Turning Basin of the James River and Kanawha Canal once sat, developers were excavating to build the James Center and Omni Hotel. Convinced that sunken treasures were hidden beneath what was about to become three high-rise buildings, the amateur river detectives donned hard hats and persuaded a backhoe operator to let them onto the site. It didn't take long for their instincts to pay off: After a bit of poking around, Trout and Moore uncovered the outline of a ship. As it turned out, buried below the mud lay more than 100 boats and a trove of other artifacts.

"The Virginia Canals and Navigations Society in Amherst County has thousands of artifacts that were removed during the canal basin digs," says historian Brian Coffield, a member of the society. "That includes functional items that they would have used like pots and pans and knives and axes."

The publicity surrounding this remarkable archaeological find sparked a renewed interest in river exploration. In 1984, Joe Ayers, a resident of Columbia, Virginia, a hamlet on the banks of the James River, built the first replica batteau and poled it to Richmond. He founded the James River Batteau Festival in 1985, an annual event that continues to this day. Each June, participants embark on an eight-day journey, navigating 120 miles from Lynchburg to Maiden's Landing, an unincorporated

community in Goochland, Virginia. The festival typically features 10 to 15 crewed batteaux, along with numerous kayakers and canoers joining the parade.

One of the festival's earliest participants was Ralph Smith, Will Smith's father. He built his first batteau in 1988, the year after Will was born.

"I practically grew up on a batteau," says Will Smith.

Live-fire chef Sarah Rennie offers onboard suppers evoking the fare of the past. Courtesy of the James River Batteau Company

By 2006, Smith and his high school classmate Will Cash were already crewing their own boat during the festival. After college and journeys abroad, the pair returned to Virginia eager to build lives that combined their passions for travel and history. In 2022, they launched the James River Batteau Company, offering tours aboard their replica batteau, the Morning Dew. But a chance encounter with live-fire chef Sarah Rennie of the caterer Two Fire Table in 2023 ignited a new vision. Smith and Cash glimpsed a way to deepen the voyage by partnering with Rennie to offer onboard suppers evoking the fare of the past.

Unlike their regular afternoon cruises, which often invite passengers to take a dip in the river, the Farm to Batteau dinner cruise comes complete with a live-fire-cooked meal prepared by Rennie on the boat while floating along the James at sunset. On a handful of dates from May through October, Cash and Smith drop anchor parallel to the village of Scottsville, offering historical storytelling and song as guests enjoy Rennie's locally sourced meal.

Culinary clues

So, what exactly did batteaumen eat? The aforementioned ashcakes and salt pork were standard fare, but beyond that, the answer is a bit elusive. Most surviving records were penned by white men, which complicates matters. As Coffield warns, "I've come to the conclusion that much of what white people—and especially enslavers—recorded must be regarded with a measure of skepticism." This cautionary perspective is why Cash and Smith are meticulous about avoiding anachronistic embellishments in their narratives—a principle they've adhered to from the outset.

However, that legendary archaeological dig did reveal a few clues. In addition to the boats, Trout and Morris uncovered parasols, pocket knives and a wealth of food remnants. According to a 2014 story by Richmond magazine, the discoveries included "piles of watermelon seeds, chicken bones, cuts of meat including pork chops, and almost-fossilized catfish."

"They would have had makeshift galleys," says Cash. Dirt piled beneath the ribs of the stern and capped with pig iron created hearths, Coffield explains. Some unearthed batteaux even had evidence of fires at both ends of the boat, suggesting they were used for warming as well as cooking.

Rennie's meals are locally sourced. Courtesy of the James River Batteau Company

The Farm to Batteau dinner cruises happen on a handful of dates from May through October. Courtesy of the James River Batteau Company

Onboard, the air is laced with the scent of fire-kissed trout. Courtesy of the James River Batteau Company

Excavations of slave dwellings at Monticello, Jefferson's estate in Charlottesville, Virginia, have also provided insight into the diets of enslaved individuals. According to a 1990 report published in the journal American Antiquity, the faunal assemblage uncovered on Mulberry Row, the central area of the plantation, revealed that enslaved people had access to a diverse range of protein sources. In addition to the expected pig, cattle and chicken bones, archaeologists discovered remains of rabbit, squirrel, opossum, pheasant and deer—further evidence that these individuals made use of the resources available to them on the plantation during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

George Bagby, a 19th-century journalist who wrote for Harper's New Monthly magazine and the Atlantic Monthly, wrote in his 1879 book Canal Reminiscences: Recollections of Travel in the Old Days on the James River and Kanawha Canal that "fish of the very best, both salt and fresh, chickens, eggs, milk and the invincible,

never-satisfying ashcake and fried bacon," were staples for batteaumen.

The practice of shoreline sourcing appears to have provided men with a crucial boost of calories. Nineteenth-century journalist David Hunter Strother's book Virginia Illustrated: Containing a Visit to the Virginian Canaan, and the Adventures of Porte Crayon and His Cousins suggests that meals were often augmented with a hat full of eggs or a loose chicken procured along the way. On the return trip home from Richmond, when weary crews faced journeys of up to 15 days poling and sometimes walking their freight upstream, the cargo they carried might have added some additional sweetener. Jefferson lamented that batteaumen frequently pilfered cargo, making off with goods such as molasses and wine.

Rennie likes to envision armadas of boats gliding past the James River's wild papaw trees, pausing to gather the fruit for dessert. And why not? Unlike the confines of plantation life, the open water offered, if not freedom, then at least a sense of autonomy. If there was ever a time to savor the river, it was after hours. With every fire-kissed bite and every chord strummed beneath the setting sun, Rennie's meals of sausages, peas, corn and peppers serve as a reminder that even in the darkest currents of history, moments of perseverance and ingenuity manage to surface.

Cruisegoers get a freshly charred meal made to order and an acoustic song courtesy of Smith. Courtesy of the James River Batteau Company

Strother romanticized the nocturnal scenes along the iconic waterway:

"Night was the glorious time when the boats were drawn along shore in some still cove beneath the spreading umbrage of a group of sycamores. … The sly whiskey-jug was passed about, banjos and fiddles were drawn from their hiding places, the dusky improvisatore took his seat on the bow of a boat and poured forth his wild recitative, while the leathern lungs of 50 choristers made the dim shores echo with the refrain."

While Smith warns that, like everything in the written record, this too should be taken with a batteau's worth of salt, multiple accounts suggest that these lighthearted scenes hold more than a grain of truth.

"Music was very much a part of the night," says Smith. "Music, food and whiskey." And that's what you'll get during Farm to Batteau—a freshly charred meal made to order, an acoustic song courtesy of Smith and, if you go for brown water, a BYOB dram to wash it all down.

As the batteau drifts through the fading light, it's impossible not to reflect on the resilience and grit of the men who once navigated these waters—enslaved, freed and impoverished alike. Their work was grueling, their lives constrained, yet each night on the river offered a fleeting taste of independence.

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Kinsey Gidick is a freelance writer based in central Virginia. She previously served as editor in chief of Charleston City Paper in Charleston, South Carolina, and has been published in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Travel + Leisure, the BBC, Atlas Obscura, Thrillist and Anthony Bourdain's Explore Parts Unknown, among others. When not writing, she spends her time traveling with her son and history teacher husband. Read her work at kinseygidick.com.

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New Animated Map Provides a Fresh Perspective Of The Battle Of Bentonville

The American Battlefield Trust's latest video release coincides with the 160th anniversary of the battle

Jared Herr, jherr@battlefields.org, ABT

March 21, 2025

(Washington, D.C.) — The American Battlefield Trust's newest animated map, The Battle of Bentonville, provides viewers with an immersive look at the final full-scale action of the Civil War. Produced by the award-winning Wide Awake Films, this equally engaging and educational production brings to life the three days Union and Confederate forces clashed 160 years ago in Johnston County, N.C. The seven-minute video skillfully blends motion graphics, engaging narration and battle reenactment footage, giving viewers a clear understanding of the largest battle fought on North Carolina soil.

"The Battle of Bentonville marked a monumental moment in the final weeks of the Civil War, and the hallowed ground we have preserved on that site is one of our great successes," said Trust President David Duncan. "The 160th anniversary is the

perfect moment to deliver a new avenue to further the public's understanding of this crucial battle and the importance of saving the Bentonville Battlefield."

The animated map debuts as the Trust is four separate tracts at Bentonville, two on the southwest area of the battlefield and two to the northeast, totaling nearly 200 acres. These pieces of land were central to the fighting in March of 1865 and are adjacent to other land saved by the Trust. With the generous support of donors and federal, state and local grants, the Trust is fighting to ensure these vital pieces of American history are not lost forever, but rather cherished by generations to come, alongside the more than 1,900 acres of hallowed ground already preserved by the Trust on the Bentonville Battlefield.

https://youtu.be/DCvpJxbsEcc

"The power of Bentonville is palpable to anyone who visits the battlefield," said State Representative Larry Strickland. "This animated map will certainly inspire new and returning visitors to experience this hallowed ground for themselves."

The Battle of Bentonville animated map is the latest addition to the Trust's ever-growing arsenal of video productions, which have collectively garnered millions of views across the globe. The latest map compliments last year's production North Carolina at War, which highlighted 100 years of military history in the Tar Heel State. These resources, from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War and beyond, continue to educate and engage viewers eager to explore America's most significant conflicts.

In early 1865, William T. Sherman's army moved out of Georgia and into the Carolinas, with the goal of destroying railroads and supply lines before joining with Ulysses S. Grant's armies near Richmond. To oppose this action, Confederate President Jefferson Davis tasked Joseph E. Johnston with collecting what remained of the Confederate forces in the Western Theater, move them north to oppose Sherman and hopefully join with Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. However, Johnston's army would never make it to Virginia, as they were forced to clash with Sherman at Bentonville from March 19-21, resulting in the last large-scale battle of the Civil War.

The American Battlefield Trust is dedicated to preserving America's hallowed battlegrounds and educating the public about what happened there and why it matters today. The nonprofit, nonpartisan organization has protected more than 58,000 acres associated with the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War, including nearly 2,000 acres of the Bentonville Battlefield. Learn more at battlefields.org.

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Fate Of Preservation Groups' Lawsuit Challenging Wilderness Crossing Mega-Development Pending with Judge

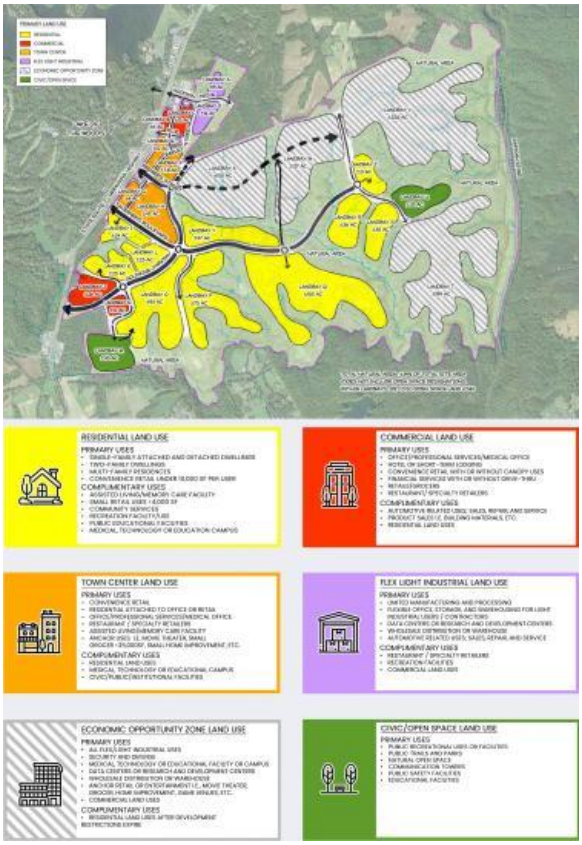
The same court last week ruled in favor of allowing two "friend of the court" briefs

to be admitted as part of the case's official record

Jared Herr, jherr@battlefields.org, ABT

March 24, 2025

(Orange, Va.) — A judge in Circuit Court of Orange County is weighing whether a lawsuit by preservation groups and local landowners challenging the sprawling Wilderness Crossing mega development at the gateway of the Wilderness Battlefield should be allowed to proceed, after hearing the irrevocable damage that could be caused to historic and cultural resources.



The Wilderness Crossing mega-development is poised to bring huge swaths of development across multiple categories – from single-family homes to data centers, distribution warehouses and other light-industrial uses. *See an enlarged map and key in the Wilderness Crossing Design Guidelines Manual.*

The American Battlefield Trust, along with the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust Inc., Friends of Wilderness Battlefield, and several nearby homeowners filed suit in May 2023 over the county's secretive and unlawful zoning process. The rezoning will make way for thousands of acres of residential, commercial and industrial development, including towering data centers and distribution warehouses, at the gateway to the Wilderness Battlefield. If built, this development will forever mar the 1864 battlefield and its landscape.

On Friday, Circuit Court Judge David B. Franzén heard arguments surrounding a motion filed by Orange County, its Board of Supervisors, and the owners of the Wilderness Crossing site that sought to throw out the case. At the end of the session, he chose not to rule from the bench on this matter, but will contemplate further and issue his verdict later in the spring.

However, Franzén did rule decisively in the plaintiffs' favor on the matter of two *amicus curiae* briefs filed by the National Parks Conservation Association, National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, as well as the Piedmont Environmental Council, in support of the lawsuit. The "friend of the court" briefs — which the defendants had sought to exclude — emphasized the conservation efforts undertaken to preserve the Wilderness Battlefield and the irreparable harm the Wilderness Crossing

development would have on the Wilderness Battlefield Unit of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Battlefield Park. Both briefs will be admitted into the case's official record.

The Wilderness Battlefield, Spotsylvania County, Va. *Matthew Hartwig*

"The Trust and its partners are grateful for the thoughtful manner in which Judge Franzén is approaching this case and the due consideration he is giving to the complex issues presented to him," said Trust President David Duncan. "We have waited patiently for the case to progress this far and eagerly await his decision, which will impact the course through which we proceed."

The Wilderness Battlefield was named one of the country's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2024. The area that was rezoned for development includes hundreds of acres identified by the National Park Service as within the historic boundaries of the battlefield.

From a grassroots organization started by historians 30 years ago, the American Battlefield Trust has grown into one of the most successful private heritage land preservation organizations in the nation. The Trust is dedicated to preserving America's hallowed battlegrounds and educating the public about what happened there and why it matters today. The nonprofit, nonpartisan organization has protected nearly 60,000 acres associated with the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War, representing more than 160 sites in 25 states. Its 350,000 members and supporters believe in the power of place and the continued relevance of history as a means to fully understand our rights and responsibilities as Americans. Learn more at www.battlefields.org.

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