



Central Virginia
Battlefields Trust

PELHAM'S CORNER CANNON

The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust (CVBT) has preserved over 1,000 acres of important Civil War sites in the Fredericksburg area either through acquisition in fee simple or through conservation easements. With only one part-time staff person, CVBT generally does not have the resources to interpret sites that it acquires. CVBT's goal is, to the greatest extent possible, to eventually transfer the properties to the National Park Service (NPS) so they may be properly interpreted and accessed by the public.



One site that CVBT owns that is open to the public and interpreted is Pelham's Corner. A one-acre parcel at the intersection of Tidewater Trail and Benchmark Road, this is the site of one of the most remarkable stories in Civil War history. Here one lone cannon not only started the momentous Battle of Fredericksburg, but also single-handedly defied an immense Union force for an hour. Major John Pelham's incredible feat at Fredericksburg inspired admiration from his contemporaries—General Robert E. Lee called him, "The Gallant Pelham," and said "It

was glorious to see such courage in one so young"—and has continued to inspire and amaze historians, students, and soldiers for generations, right up to today.

The parcel contains two interpretive signs plus a granite marker commemorating the site, installed in 1903 by Fredericksburg resident James Power Smith, a member of Stonewall Jackson's staff. The site is visited by the public and is one of the iconic locations of the Civil War. The National Park Service routinely takes visitors to the site. CVBT owns and maintains the site and is committed to enhancing visitors' experiences. In light of the impact that the Civil War Sesquicentennial is having on visitation to the area, CVBT is undertaking several improvements to the property to attract more visitors and make their experience more meaningful. The site is completely surrounded by development and because of that it is difficult for visitors to understand and appreciate the engagement in the midst of all the modern intrusions. In an effort to screen the site from modern development, CVBT has installed rows of cedars along the perimeter. It is documented that during the War cedars were on the property and this improvement will greatly add to the property's visual appeal when the trees mature.

While the landscaping will certainly increase the property's appeal to the public, the installation of a cannon would also dramatically enhance a visitor's experience, both aesthetically and educationally. Frank O'Reilly, NPS historian and author of the definitive book on the Battle of Fredericksburg, had this to say about CVBT's project:

“If ever a site cried out for a cannon to interpret and commemorate battlefield initiative and bravery, Pelham’s Corner is the one! Not only is a cannon essential to the story, it is one of the most impelling magnets to attract the curious to engage the site and learn the story. People are instantly drawn to a cannon—it is the incentive and the reward that invites visitors to explore the site. It is the tactile, tangible symbol of the importance of the location and the events performed there one hundred and fifty years ago.

Monuments are wonderful in commemorating a site and historical events, but cannons have a transcendent timeless quality to them. A cannon allows visitors to dream and wonder—they will stand behind it and picture themselves involved in the action; they will stand in front of it and examine the bore, and imagine the thunder and the effect. Monuments make us all remember—but I genuinely believe that a cannon makes us imagine and ultimately empathize with those who did great deeds under extreme duress so long ago. People may be told a barren field or an open lot is important to history—but there is no doubt in the popular mind when they see a site with a cannon. They know instinctively that this is a battlefield and something truly special, hallowed, and unique in its own right.”

CVBT is thrilled to announce the acquisition and installation of an authentic replica of a Napoleon cannon--the same artillery piece used by Pelham in his famous action. The piece was fabricated by Steen Cannon and Ordnance Works, a nationally know manufacturer of such pieces. The cost, shipping and installation of the cannon was approximately \$19,500. We are always hesitant to use our funds (your donations!) for projects other than our primary mission of battlefield preservation and



“saving dirt and grass”. With that in mind, CVBT has worked diligently to secure full funding for the cannon through a collaborative effort with several entities and a private donor. We received a grant of \$6,000 from the Duff McDuff Green, Jr. Fund of the Community Foundation of the Rappahannock River Region. The Community Foundation is a nonprofit, public charity established by local community leaders created by and for the people of Stafford, Spotsylvania, King George, Caroline counties and the City of Fredericksburg. This is the third grant that CVBT has received from this wonderful organization. CVBT received \$9,900 from The [Blue & Gray Education Society](#), one of the premier Civil War education organizations. And lastly one of CVBT’s members and stalwart supporters, James W. Davis, donated \$3,300 to CVBT for the cannon. We may incur some small incidental expenses but these will be covered by funds remaining from the landscape project, which was also an earmarked donation.

The cannon was delivered and installed on July 7. We plan a dedication ceremony on the anniversary of the “Gallant Pelham’s” action on December 13, 2013. We are excited that Park Historian Frank O’Reilly will be our keynote speaker.

CVBT envisions a real opportunity to further its mission during the Civil War Sesquicentennial. Visitation to the areas battlefields will see a marked increase. These visitors will be from the local community and from distant places. Their experiences will be enhanced and their overall understanding of our local Civil War battles, and the War as a whole, will be increased by the visibility and interpretation this project will bring to Pelham's Corner. Pelham's Corner will be a place that visitors may come to on their own, by car, or on an organized bus tour. In addition, the NPS staff will continue to visit the site on some of their tours, thus enhancing.