

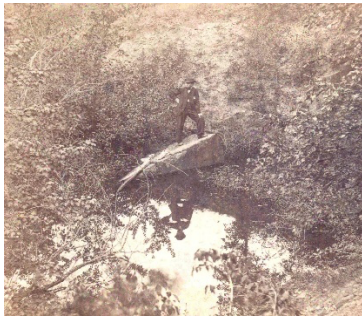
West of Willoughby's Run

By Bob Zeller

With a front row seat rarely matched in the annals of history, 16-year-old Amelia Harmon watched in horror and awe from an upper floor window/or cupola of her home on the morning of July 1, 1863, as Union and Confederate troops began ravaging each other in mortal combat on her family's farm just west of Gettysburg.

"We did not know it then but were in the very center of the first shock of the battle between (Confederate Gen. A.P.) Hill's forces and the advance line of (Union Gen. John) Buford's Cavalry" she recalled many years later. "Horses and men were falling under our eyes by shots from an unseen foe, and the confusion became greater every minute."

Although the auto tour route at the Gettysburg National Military Park skirts Willoughby's Run on the first day's battlefield, it does not take visitors across the stream to the western side, overlooking all of the intense fighting that occurred west of Willoughby's Run on the first day of the battle, not to mention the fact that the first shots of the battle were fired there.



Willoughby's Run in 1867 (Garry Adelman)

This area saw the initial Union cavalry phase, the first Confederate infantry advance, the first Union counterattack, the rare capture of a Confederate general and finally a massive assault by multiple Confederate brigades that helped give the edge to the Southerners in the first day of the fighting. The western side of Willoughby's Run was as much a part of the Gettysburg battlefield as the Wheatfield or Little Round Top.

But this was a battle that was destined to last two more days, and these first events, dramatic and bloody as they were, quickly became overshadowed by the fighting on Culp's Hill, Little Round Top, the Wheatfield and the Peach Orchard and ultimately, Pickett's Charge, the and the High Water Mark.

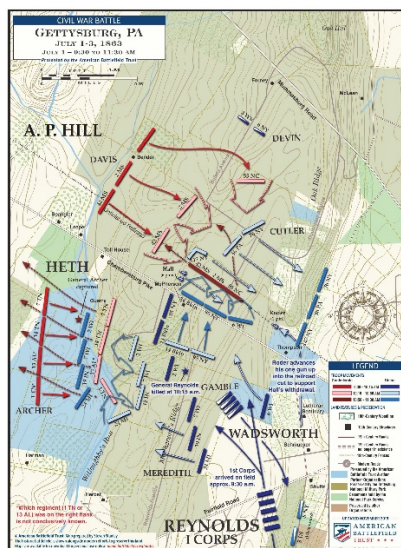
But the battlefield west of Willoughby's Run has not been part of the recognized battlefield for much of the existence of the national park. Until recent years, the National Park Service owned no battlefield land west of the stream. As park visitors stopped at McPherson Ridge and the place where Union Gen. John Reynolds was killed during a Union counterattack on the first day, they

had little or no chance to understand all that happened even further west, on the other side of the run.

For one thing, Willoughby's Run is a natural obstacle. It complicated things for the armies during the battle and has continued to influence events since then. For many years, it marked the western boundary of the national park in the area between Chambersburg Pike and Fairfield Road.

Only now is the battlefield on the western side of Willoughby's Run getting serious preservation attention. The National Park Service now owns core battlefield at what used to be the Gettysburg Country Club as well as a forested tract just west of it where Confederate troops mobilized before their assaults.

But these preservation successes cannot come to full fruition without the acquisition of a 14.5-acre tract providing crucial frontage to Chambersburg Pike that allows access to the other preserved land. The tract under threat is already developed and zoned for further commercial development, thus presenting a costly proposition to the American Battlefield Trust.



The first phases of fighting around the target tract, which appears in green.

This land must be acquired and preserved. Only then will it be possible to properly interpret the opening salvos in the Battle of Gettysburg and incorporate them into the greater interpretation and presentation of events to present a fuller history of the battle.

Soon after the Civil War, this tract and the hallowed ground around it quickly gave way to another purpose that in its own unique way added another layer of history to the landscape. In 1869, only six years after the battle, one of Gettysburg's most famous resorts – the Katalysine Springs Hotel – was built on the former Harmon farm. The hotel was built next to Katalysine Spring, which seeped out of the ground along Willoughby's Run just below the Pike. The spring water was said to be rich in curative minerals that distinguished it with “peculiarly valuable

medicinal qualities.” Boosted by good reviews and publicity, the mineral spring water was being bottled and shipped all over the country in 1868, making Gettysburg known for something other than the battle and the famous address delivered there.



The Springs Hotel in its heyday (Gettysburg National Military Park)

The expansive four-story hotel, complete with a copula that towered three more stories above the main building, catered to Katalysine Spring visitors but even more so to battlefield visitors, especially the veterans who returned by the thousands to see where they fought. A horse railway would take them from the hotel over a little bridge spanning Willoughby’s Run to Gettysburg, the train station and the battlefield proper.

It may have been an afterthought that the hotel itself sat where the battle heated up.

By the 20th century the hotel was in decline. It was already closed and vacant when it burned to the ground in 1917 on a snow-covered December day. In 1948, the property became the Gettysburg Country Club, with a modest, little nine-hole golf course and a clubhouse.

The club’s half-size golf course was certainly nothing to brag about, but it gained instant recognition and distinction beginning on April 2, 1955, when President Dwight D. Eisenhower played his first round at the country club, having established his home at his farm in Gettysburg five years earlier. Golfers usually made two loops around the nine holes, using different tees for the second round. Eisenhower shot 89 that day against a par 70, struggling during the first nine but coming back with three pars on the second nine.



The clubhouse, seen here some six decades after the battle, still stands today. (Adams County Historical Society)

The course was a far cry from Augusta National Golf Club, where he was a member and a regular. But Ike would return time and time again to play Gettysburg Country Club, with many of the rounds noted in the Gettysburg Times. His caddy was the course superintendent, Art Kennell. Usually, he took three trips around the course, playing 27 holes.

During many pleasant rounds, perhaps only once did the tension level rise to anything close to that experienced by the countless soldiers who had fought and bled on these same acres almost a century before.

The third hole was the longest of the nine holes, a 500-plus yard par 5 that ran parallel to Willoughby's Run. Eisenhower was well-versed on the battle of Gettysburg and had first visited the battlefield in 1915 as a West Point cadet. So, when he launched tee shots on the long third hole, he likely knew that he was near where Confederate Gen. James Archer was captured in the maelstrom and confusion of a withering assault by the Union Iron Brigade on the first day of the battle.

One day, however, potential trouble suddenly appeared. The Secret Service had alerted Eisenhower about possible danger from a man who had been in a Baltimore institution. And now there was a man – a stranger – walking up the fairway along the tree line by Willoughby's Run, approaching the president and coming ever closer.

"I think that man is after me," Eisenhower told Kennell.

A state policeman, instead of taking charge, told the caddy to go find out what the man wanted.

"So, setting off across the fairway with some apprehension, I intercepted the man, explained he was on a private golf course and asked what he wanted," Pennell recalled years later.

"I want to see Eisenhower," the man replied.

Kennell returned to the group, told the police what the man had said. At this point they took over and escorted him from the course. And Eisenhower and his partners resumed playing golf.

On occasion, a low-flying plane would pass over the course and Kennell said Eisenhower would always move off the fairway and stand under a tree. Instinctively seeking cover from airplanes

was a lingering habit from World War II. The Union and Confederates who had fought on this land a century earlier could relate.

Eventually, like the Katalysine Springs Hotel, the country club and its golf course went into decline. The club declared bankruptcy in 2008. Three years later, the National Park Service purchased the golf course with help from the Trust and other organizations.

But the acquisition did not include the 14.5 acres that included the old clubhouse building, which had been extensively renovated, as well as other buildings, a parking lot, tennis courts, a swimming pool and, perhaps most importantly for history's sake, had easy access to the golf course property. This tract – the front door to the first day's battlefield on the west side of Willoughby's Run – has remained in private hands. It is essential that this land is acquired so we can take advantage of the entire range of interpretive opportunities of all the layers of history enshrined here.

Before the Battle of Gettysburg, Union Gen. John Buford arrived with his cavalry and dispatched troopers out the various roads leading into town to watch for approaching Confederates. At about 7:30 a.m. on July 1, pickets of the 8th Illinois Cavalry who were posted on a ridge overlooking Marsh Creek about a mile and a half beyond Willoughby's Run engaged the van of Gen. Henry Heth's approaching Confederate division. The Union pickets "fell back slowly, making all the resistance in their power" knowing that "arrangements were made to hold the rebels in check until the infantry could come up."ⁱ

By 8:30 a.m., Archer's brigade had advanced a mile and a half to Herr's Ridge and was deploying and preparing for battle in the cover of the woods west of the golf course acreage and Willoughby's Run.

Meanwhile Union troops by the thousands were establishing lines on the east side of the Run. Nine hundred Union soldiers took positions along the stream, with some deploying on the west side of the run.

Archer's brigade began to face heavy fire as it approached Willoughby's Run. Confederates began to fall on our target property and the golf course acreage. Burkitt Fry, Colonel of the 13th Alabama recalled that "the brigade rushed impetuously forward. A brief and fierce fight at short range, ensued in which we lost heavily in killed and wounded."ⁱⁱ

Col. Samuel Shepherd, commander of the 7th Tennessee, reported that his regiment "advanced directly upon the enemy through an open field" – the target tract – and "rushed across (Willoughby's Run) with a cheer and met the enemy just beyond."

Soon after crossing, Archer's brigade was slammed by the full force of an attack by the Iron Brigade led by the 2nd Wisconsin and "and the most desperate engagement commenced."ⁱⁱⁱ During this fighting, Union Gen. John Reynolds was killed in McPherson's Woods.

The 7th Wisconsin responded to a deadly volley from Archer's Brigade with an almost-insane bayonet charge. Lt. Col. John Callis recalled: "My horse was shot, and I received two buckshot, one in the hip and one in the right side but not serious. Many officers and men of my regt. and in

fact of the entire brigade were killed and wounded by the first volley, which caused some confusion for the moment, and I seeing our perilous condition and not being loaded, threw the 7th into line facing the enemy and not feeling like standing under that galling fire to load, gave the order to 'Fix Bayonets' and charge on the double quick; and away we went depending on cold steel.

"Just then Capt. [Craig W.] Wadsworth of Gen. Wadsworth's staff came up behind us and ordered 'Halt, halt.' I heard it and said 'Halt, halt,' but it was now too late to halt, and our rushing charge seemed to be irresistible, and backward we drove the enemy across Willoughby's Run and into their works they had hastily improvised where we captured the greater portion of Gen. Archer's brigade."

Archer was captured on the west side of Willoughby's Run about 30 paces from the stream and not far from the spring. The general may have been trying to hide in a clump of willows when he was spotted by a bold and fervent Irish private in the 2nd Wisconsin, Patrick Maloney, who rushed forward in advance of his comrades and grabbed the general. A physical struggle ensued until other Union soldiers arrived to help subdue the Confederate commander.

Lt. Dennis B. Dailey, the acting Aide-de-Camp, 1st Brigade, 1st Division, 1st Corps, recalled years later that "when I arrived on the spot, Gen. Archer appealed to me for protection from Maloney."

Archer reluctantly surrendered his sword and belt – the first general to be captured in the Confederate Army under the command of Gen. Robert E. Lee. Archer had been plagued with illness during the war and his health did not benefit during the next two years as he bounced around Union prisoner-of-war facilities. He was finally exchanged and rejoined the Confederate army to briefly serve during the Siege of Petersburg until his health failed once again. He died in Richmond on Oct. 24, 1864.

The Iron Brigade pursued Archer's retreating troops across Willoughby's Run and advanced across the open fields of the Harmon farm. A terrified Amelia Harmon and her aunt fled to the basement of the Harmon farmhouse as the fighting intensified. The advance of the Iron Brigade across the Harmon farm came to a halt when two more Confederate brigades arrived in massive lines of battle and began moving toward the Union troops and Willoughby's Run.

In the face of the advance of this much larger Confederate force, the Iron Brigade fell back across Willoughby's Run and began reforming on the east side of the stream at McPherson's Ridge and other locations.

For the Confederates, it was no easy advance across the open fields of the Harmon Farm that, almost a century later, would provide relaxation and friendly competition for the 34th president of the United States and the country's greatest military leader in World War II.

A veteran's account in *Confederate Veteran* described the ordeal of an assault across open land under fire: "...not many steps are taken until the enemy opens fire on (the men), and you observe men falling here and there. Several are killed and wounded; two of Company E have fallen; one of them is dead. The men are keeping step and the line is as pretty and perfect as a regiment ever made....Look! The brave color bearer, Mansfield, is on his knees and the colors are on the

ground! Has he stumbled over that rock? No. He is wounded, and Sergt. Hiram Johnson is taking up the colors to bear them onward...To the right of us and to the left of us men are falling, some killed, more wounded...Scores of men are hit while the regiment is crossing the Run and getting into proper position on the other side.”

The Confederates cleared out the Union troops in the Harmon home as the advancing lines swept past. Looking up through a basement window, Amelia saw “the sound and shadow of hundreds of marching feet. We can see them to the knees only, but the uniforms are the Confederate gray!”

The terrified women are soon forced out onto the open battlefield as Confederate troops set fire to their house and barn.

“We fled from our burning house only to encounter worse horrors,” Amelia wrote. “The first Rebel line of battle had passed the house and were now engaged in a hot skirmish in the gorge of Willoughby’s Run. The second was just abreast of the barn, and at the moment were being hotly attacked by the Union troops with shot and shell! We were between the lines! To go toward town would be to walk into the jaws of death. Only one way was open – through the ranks of the whole Confederate army to safety in its rear! Bullets whistled past our ears, shells burst and scattered their contents all about us. On we hurried – wounded men falling all around us...”

The two women eventually reached safety as two more Confederate brigades joined the battle and brutal, bloody fighting continued at McPherson’s Ridge and Seminary Ridge that helped the Confederates to take Gettysburg as the first day of the battle came to an end.

The battlefield west of Willoughby’s Run would almost immediately be overshadowed by the dizzying torrent of historic events that came during the next two days of fighting. But this area’s legacy as hallowed ground cannot be overlooked. Soldiers from no fewer than six Confederate and two Union brigades traversed and fought over these acres.

The American Battlefield Trust in the past 25 years has preserved more than 1,240 acres at Gettysburg in 40+ transactions scattered all over the battlefield, but none bring quite the measure of the layers of history as the long-sought acquisition of the final 14.5 acres of the old Gettysburg Country Club along Chambersburg Pike just west of Willoughby’s Run.

ⁱ Reports of Maj. Gen. Henry Heth, C. S. Army, Commanding division OR Series 1, Volume 27, Part II, Reports, 637; Abner Hard, M. D., *History of the 8th Cavalry Regiment, Illinois Volunteers, During the Great Rebellion*, (Aurora, ILLS., 1868), 256-257; Letter of Col. Birkett D. Fry, Montgomery, Ala. Feb. 10th, 1878, Bachelder Vol. 3, 1931-1932; actions also described in, Eric Wittenburg, *“The Devil’s to Pay”: John Buford at Gettysburg, A History and Walking Tour* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2014), Harry Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The First Day* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 51-68; David G. Martin, *Gettysburg: July 1* (Pennsylvania: Combined Books, 1995), 68-88; 74-102; Edwin B.

Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command*, (New York: First Touchstone Edition, 1997), 266-267; 270-271.

ⁱⁱ Letter of Col. Birkett D. Fry, Montgomery, AL, December 27th, 1877, Bachelder Vol. 1, p. 516-518

ⁱⁱⁱ Notes From a Conversation with Col. Lucius Fairchild, 2nd Wisconsin Vol., Bachelder Vol. 1, p. 335-336