

April 22, 1987

Brian Pohanka
777 Duke Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Mr. Pohanka:

I am an historian at the Petersburg National Battlefield and have formerly worked at Fredericksburg National Military Park. I visited Fredericksburg last week and while there had an opportunity to speak with my old boss, Bob Krick. I discussed with him my concern over the widespread destruction of Civil War sites in Virginia and suggested to him the need for an organization whose sole purpose was to preserve Civil War sites. The Friends of Virginia Civil War Battlefields was established for such a purpose, but after several years' existence they have accomplished little in this regard, nor will they under the present leadership. I expressed to Bob my belief that an entirely new organization was needed, one with a younger, more dynamic leadership that would ~~seek to~~ proactively seek to preserve battlefields before they were threatened rather than to sound the tocsin in a reactive way after a site is publically slated for destruction. He expressed some reservations about the difficulties in creating and managing such an organization, but suggested I get in contact with you, as an outspoken preservationist, to get your views on the matter.

As I see it, the preservation movement has failed in recent years not for lack of interest, but for lack of an organization which might channel the energies of interested individuals to good purpose. The few instances where public support has been marshalled against a development, they have usually failed because developers had already purchased the land and were able to hypnotize local councilmen with the specious, but nonetheless effective arguments of "broader tax bases" and "increased tax revenues." To the ears of a modern politician with no interest in the Civil War, the cries of a few "fanatical" history buffs pales against the panacea of the almighty dollar. How much easier it would be to get these people to set aside land for battlefields if there was no opposition, if they had no one whispering "money" in their other ear! My proposal, then, is to create an organization whose purpose is to preserve battlefield land by direct purchase, donations, scenic easements, rezoning, and the creation or extension of parks, if possible, before they are imminently threatened with development.

The organization I envision would consist of a small, but active, group of members divided into local chapters based on geography and answerable to a single central committee. It would be the duty of the chapters to

- 1) Monitor threats to Civil War sites in their district
- 2) Advise the central committee on the best way to protect threatened sites in their area
- 3) Work with local zoning boards, county councils and other local authorities to set aside parcels of land by the establishment of local, state, or regional parks; by rezoning; or by other local ordinances
- 4) Manage any lands administered by the organization in their district

The central committee, consisting of the various chapter presidents and an overall President, would have as its duties:

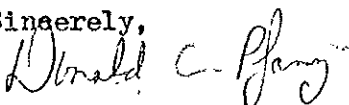
- 1) The development of an overall preservation strategy, including the initiation of various letter-writing campaigns
- 2) Proper allocation of organization resources
- 3) The distribution of a simple newsletter, perhaps four times a year keeping members informed of various threats throughout the state and directing members as to what measures need to be taken
- 4) Lobbying state and national figures

In addition, I would like to form a special donations committee, consisting of a few of the older, more dignified and well-spoken of the members whose task it would be to solicit large companies in Virginia and elsewhere for large donations. Nearly all of these companies, I gather, have large amounts of money set aside for public relations purposes, which might be put as well toward battlefields as anything else. Some battlefields, such as Five Forks and parts of the Chancellorsville, are actually owned by companies, which, with a little persuasion, might be willing to donate a few hundred acres to the cause for a little favorable publicity. I'm convinced the opportunities are there, but have not been tapped.

I have one final idea I'd like to throw out for your consideration. Perhaps as a big inaugural drive, get the Civil War community aroused through the various publications and organizations (CWRTA, Blue & Gray, CWTI, etc.) to start an organized campaign to get Congress to pass a bill authorizing the extension of National Park boundaries at Virginia Civil War battlefields to encompass land necessary to protect the battlefields, and to authorize the necessary funding to purchase that land. Imagine, in one fell swoop, adding thousands of acres to places like Manassas, Petersburg, the Wilderness, and the Richmond Battlefields among others. It would be expensive to be sure, but then we're dealing with a Congress which, without blinking, passed an \$85 billion highway bill filled with pork-barrel projects, any one of which alone would cost more than we would ask. National parks hold a treasured place in the hearts of Americans and politicians, if publically faced with a bill to protect those parks, might hesitate to turn it down. However, it would take a mammoth letter-writing campaign that would require the whole-hearted support of all the major publications and groups. Before the bill came to the floor of Congress, we could have Jerry Russell call each Round Table president and request that at some specific meeting, they pass out pens, paper, and stamped envelopes to each member present and have them write a letter to their congressman, while at the meeting. In this way thousands of letters would be insured.

Well, I've gone on long enough. I thank you for taking time to read this, and would much like to get your comments, positive and negative. You might wish to sound out your Civil War colleagues in Northern Virginia and get their views. If the program receives a warm response by those concerned, we can move ahead; if not, nothing has been lost by the effort.

Sincerely,



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