

*Agency Official 106 Effect Report*

*Replacement of Storm Doors on the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia*

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County Battlefields Memorial National Military Park  
120 Chatham Lane  
Fredericksburg, Virginia 22405**

## Purpose

Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County Battlefields Memorial National Military Park was authorized by an act of Congress on February 14, 1927 (44 Stat. 1091). The purpose of the park, as stated in the act, is “to commemorate the Civil War battles of Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania Court House, Wilderness, and Chancellorsville, including Salem Church ... to survey, locate, and preserve the lines of the opposing armies in said battles, to open, construct, and repair such roads, highways, paths, and other approaches as may be necessary to make the historical points accessible to the public and to students of said battles ... and together also with such additional land as the Secretary of War may deem necessary for monuments, markers, tablets, roads, highways, paths, approaches, and to carry out the general purposes of this Act.” By Executive Order 6166 in 1933 the park was transferred to the Department of the Interior to be administered by the National Park Service.

Furthermore, the National Park Service Mission Statement includes:

*The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.*

To achieve this mission, the National Park Service adheres to the following guiding principles:

*Excellent Service: Providing the best possible service to park visitors and partners.*

*Heritage Education: Educating park visitors and the general public about their history and common heritage.*

## Need

The Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center has evolved from its original intent as the park administration building to a present-day visitor center serving the National Park Service on the Fredericksburg Battlefield. In the past seventy-five years, the interior has been adapted from its original use as park administrative offices to a visitor-use area to both interpret and orient park visitors to the battlefield and park resources. Current museum and interpretive exhibits were installed in 2013.

The Fredericksburg Museum and Administration Building was built as a Works Progress Administration project that commenced in 1935. The building was designed to house offices for park staff, including the superintendent. The basement contained offices, restrooms, a storage room, boiler room, and an exhibit space. The main entrance floor contained more offices, an exhibit space, and a lecture room. The second floor contained strictly offices. The building was completed in 1936.

For the first thirty years of its existence, the building served primarily as administrative offices. The doors were locked during the day and visitors were forced to ring a doorbell, whereupon a

staff member would let them inside to retrieve information and see the two small exhibit spaces. During the 1960s, the NPS pushed the idea of developing more visitor-friendly spaces, which resulted in “visitor centers.” The Fredericksburg Museum and Administration Building was altered to adapt its interior space as a visitor center. Offices in the basement were moved out of the building and that space was opened as an exhibit room. On the entrance floor, two offices were removed: the first near the front door had its walls removed and the space redesigned as an information desk; the second office had its walls removed and was opened as additional space. The lecture hall received an electric interpretive map program and was converted into an auditorium where regularly scheduled automated programs could be shown. Later the electric map was replaced by a slide and audio program before more recently being replaced by a movie. All of the exhibit spaces also received newly constructed museum displays in 2013, which involved a lot more artifacts on display.

As visitation to the park has risen over the past fifty years, the adapted use of the entrance floor as a visitor use area has revealed some flaws. 56,463 visitors passed through the visitor center doors in 2016. On a busy summer day, 200 visitors might come through the building. The front and rear doors serve as the only access to and from the building. To facilitate the use as a visitor center and provide an inviting appearance, the large heavy wood doors are left open. While it remains unknown when storm or screen doors were first added to the building, they were in place by the 1960s. The current storm doors, installed in 2004, are vinyl and glass and are in need of replacement. The continued opening and closing of the doors, hundreds of times each day, can affect the environment of the building, with modest changes to the inside temperature and humidity. Additionally, the afternoon sun beats down on the south façade of the building, also affecting modest changes to the interior climate. The park plans to replace the current storm doors with something more substantial that will create a better seal when closed and will include better insulation.

## **Property Description**

A. Major Physical Components – The Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center sits on National Park Service land on the Fredericksburg Battlefield. It is bordered by a visitor parking lot to the north, Lafayette Boulevard (Business US Route 1) to south, the Fredericksburg National Cemetery to the west, and an overflow parking lot to the east. The property is landscaped and maintained by the National Park Service as a visitor use and access area and receives the highest visitation of any site within the park.

B. Architectural Significance – The Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center was constructed between 1935 and 1936 by the Works Progress Administration. In the most recent draft of the park’s National Register of Historic Places documentation update, the visitor center (NR #FR0146d) is considered a contributing structure under the park’s subtheme: Military Park Development by the War Department, Civilian Conservation Corps, and the National Park Service – 1927 to 1956. The Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center is on the park’s List of Classified Structures – LCS#82069. Slight modifications over the last seventy-five years have changed the floor plan on the entrance floor with the removal of walls that have opened more space and allowed for the creation of an information desk.

## **Description of Alternatives**

### **Alternative A – No Action**

Under this alternative, the existing storm doors would remain in place and no improvement to the doors' insulation would be made.

### **Alternative B – Replacement In-Kind of Existing Storm Doors**

Under this alternative, the existing vinyl and glass doors would be replaced with doors of the exact same style and construction. While this would replace the deteriorated existing doors, it would do nothing to improve the insulation and of the doors.

### **Alternative C – Construction of an Exterior Vestibule**

Under this alternative, a vestibule would be built at both the front and rear entrance of the building. While this would make significant improvements to insulating the entrances to the building and thus help to control the environment, the structural changes would surely result in an "adverse effect" to overall appearance and integrity of the building.

### **Alternative D – Installation of New Insulated Store Doors**

Under this alternative, new insulated storm doors would be added to both the front and rear entrances of the building. This would involve the installation of two custom white finish storefront doors, (1) 43½" x 85 ½" and (1) 41" x 83 ½", which consist of 1" tempered insulated Low-E Glass which controls solar heat gain, which is essential to minimizing cooling costs and offers an exterior appearance similar to clear, uncoated glass. The doors will have narrow stiles (frame), 10" bottom rails bottom sweep, an overhead Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant concealed closer with offset arm assembly. Also it will involve the installation of a ½" x 4" ADA saddle threshold. The doors are ADA compliant (No automatic door opener/push button. The weight of the doors meets ADA standards for accessibility.) The framing system will fit within the existing door opening and will not involve intrusion upon historic fabric, other than bolting into the existing frame. The installation of these doors is reversible.

## **Description of Mitigation Measures**

A. The aluminum storm doors will be white, to mimic the doors they are replacing.

B. The installation will not require any removal of historic fabric and the installation is fully reversible.

## **Park Consultation**

The proposal is being circulated, for comment, to the park's Section-106 advisors for historic architecture.

The proposal is going through a 30-day public comment and review period. During this time, the project is being posted on the National Park Service Planning, Environmental, and Public Comment System (PEPC) website. The park has contacted, and solicited comments from, representatives of interested organizations such as the University of Mary Washington's Department of Historic Preservation, the Friend of the Fredericksburg Area Battlefields, the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust, the City of Fredericksburg, and the Pamunkey Indian Tribe.

The proposal will be sent to the State Historic Preservation Office (Virginia Department of Historic Resources) for a 30-day review.

### **Effect Analysis**

During the rehabilitation of the interior space, some historic fabric will be affected. The existing floor plan on the entrance floor will be altered, however some features will be retained that will reflect the original floor plan. It is the park's belief that the project as proposed will result in the better long-term overall continued use of the structure with improved exhibits and improved traffic patterns and flow. For this reason, the park's opinion is that this undertaking will have "no adverse effect" on architectural resources.

### **Report Prepared By**

Eric J. Mink

Section-106 Coordinator/Cultural Resources Management Specialist