

Agency Official 106 Effect Report

*Waterproof Foundation and Improve Drainage for the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor
Center
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 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. 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 were converted to exhibit spaces. In 2014-2015, new exhibits were installed and the auditorium moved into a basement space. The basement also houses the boiler room and the restrooms.

The original design of the visitor center included interior gutters and interior downspouts. The gutters are built into the slope of the roof and the downspouts are built into the walls of the building. Eighty-four years later, the downspouts in the walls have failed, deteriorated and ceased to function. Inspection with a drain camera revealed that the deterioration of fabric has resulted in blockage of the downspouts. During periods of moderate to heavy rain, the downspouts don't work and the gutters overflow. Additionally, over the last five years the park has encountered increasing incidents of flooding in the basement at times of even moderate rain.

Overtime, the park has taken short-term actions such as installing exterior downspouts, but the basement continues to flood, so a more comprehensive approach is needed. To fix, rehab or replace the interior downspouts would require taking the building apart at each corner and rebuilding the interior drainage system. The risk to the building and historic fabric would be high. The park is proposing to excavate the entire foundation of the building and waterproof it; more systematically and strategically place and install exterior gutters and downspouts; and underground the drainage from the new gutter system to an existing storm water runoff system currently in place in the parking lot behind the building.

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 the 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 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. In 1985, the park added a handicap ramp to the front of the building.

C. Archaeological Significance – The Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center occupies the previous site of the Joseph Hall House (1856-1864). The Hall House was destroyed during the war and a postwar structure may have been built on the site. By the time the War Department acquired the land in 1930, the site was occupied by a gas station. The construction of the visitor center required extensive excavation and earth movement. As the Sunken Road Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) states: "Extensive excavations for the main building likely destroyed any remaining archaeological evidence of the Hall house." (p. 59)

E. Cultural Landscape Resources – A Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) was completed for the Sunken Road Landscape in 2011. The CLI states that “The park visitor center landscape retains its feeling from the period of significance.” (p. 68)

Proposed Action

The park is proposing to waterproof the foundation walls of the visitor center; more systematically and strategically place and install exterior gutters and downspouts; and underground the drainage from the new gutter system to an existing storm water runoff system currently in place in parking lot behind the building. This work will entail:

1. Excavating approximately a 3ft.-6ft. wide by 6ft.-9ft. deep trench around the entire foundation, exposing the foundation surface and the 3-inch Vitrified Clay Pipe (VCP) that served as an original drainage system. The foundation walls will be waterproofed using a rubber membrane applied to approximately 2,205 SF of wall surface. The VCP will be replaced with flexible High Density Polyethylene Pipe (HDPE) plastic drain pipe and covered with a 6-inch layer of ½- to ¾-inch washed gravel in the trench. The new foundation drains, membrane wall fabric system drains and gutter downspout drains will follow the existing trench paths for the building’s storm drains and daylight to existing drain lines/storm drains. The trench will be backfilled, and the grade sloped away from the building using the dirt that was removed during the excavation. The area will be seeded and strawed. The front steps, American Disabilities Act ramp, metal handrail and pole lights will be reconstructed, if needed, to match the original building materials.
2. The interior rain gutter system will be capped/sealed with copper flashing and abandoned in-place. Approximately 350 Liner Feet of external 6-8-inch half round galvanized gutters along with new 6-inch round downspouts will be installed to move all water away from the building’s envelope. The downspouts will follow the existing trench paths for the buildings storm drains and daylight to existing drain lines/storm drains.

Some considerations with this project are the fact that removal of some architectural features and vegetation will need to occur. These are:

1. The front steps to the visitor center and the American Disabilities Act (ADA) ramp to the front door will need to be removed in order to gain access to the foundation on the front of the structure. The front steps are part of the original 1935-1936 construction of the building, while the ADA ramp was installed in 1985. Every effort will be made to save retain, and re-install all original materials (stone, brick, handrails, light poles), however it is possible that given the age and condition of some of the material their removal might result in their damage. If that occurs, the park will reconstruct and rebuild the features and materials to match the originals. The park does have the original construction drawings that provide good detail.

2. The ADA ramp was built in 1985 and is no longer compliant. The slope of the ramp needs to be reduced. In order to accomplish that, the ramp will need to be rebuilt with a slightly longer (1-2 feet) ramp running to the east and slightly wider (1-2 feet) to the south. This won't drastically change the appearance of the ramp but will involve an enlargement of the brick walkway by 1-2 feet when it is reinstalled.
3. The walkway in front of the building will also need to be removed in order to gain access to the foundation on the front of the structure. The brick walkway was not part of the original construction of the building and photographic evidence shows it was installed after 1965. The park will remove the walkway and reinstall it when the work is finished. The walkway will need to be extended 1-2 feet south into the current vehicular circle, in order to accommodate the rebuilt ADA ramp.
4. The vegetation that surrounds the visitor center must be removed in order to excavate down to the foundation. The park retains a copy of the original 1937 planting plan for the building and its surroundings. That, and historic photos, show that the current vegetation does not adhere to the original plan and was either installed or allowed to grow up sometime beginning in the 1980s. The current vegetation, boxwoods and hedges, is much thicker and blocks much of the building on the front. The park plans to reinstall a planting scheme much more in line with the original plans.

Description of Mitigation Measures

Every effort will be made to save retain, and re-install all original materials (stone, brick, handrails, light poles), however it is possible that given the age and condition of some of the material their removal might result in their damage. If that occurs, the park will reconstruct and rebuild the features and materials to match the originals.

Effect Analysis

It is park's opinion that the preferred alternative will have "no adverse effect" on the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center or the surrounding landscape.

Park Consultation

The proposal is being circulated to the park's Section-106 advisors for historic architecture, archaeology and cultural landscapes.

The proposal is going through a 30-day public comment and review period. During this time, the project will be placed on the NPS public website. The park will also contacted representatives of interested local organizations, such as the University of Mary Washington's Department of

Historic Preservation, the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table, the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust, City of Fredericksburg, and the Pamunkey Indian Tribe.

The project will go through a 30-day comment and review period with the Virginia SHPO.

Attached Supporting Documentation

- A. Map
- B. Photos
- C. Plans

Conclusion

At important historic sites, the proposed undertaking would foster fulfillment of the park's General Management Plan directives to protect cultural resources. It is the park's opinion that this project will have "no adverse effect" upon historic resources.

Report Prepared By

Eric J. Mink
Section-106 Coordinator/Cultural Resources Management Specialist
(540) 693-3200