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Sayler's Creek : a battlefield, a park

Peter Warren Eldredge

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SAYLER'S CREEK
A BATTLEFIELD, A PARK

BY
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A THESIS
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Approved: *William Daniel*

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CHAPTER I

THE BATTLE OF SAYLER'S CREEK

The significance in history of the land area known as Sayler's Creek is derived from the fact that the last major conflict between Union and Confederate forces was fought there on April 6, 1865. The battle has been neglected because it immediately precedes the surrender; however, the engagement does contain valuable historical information.

I. Situation Prior to the Engagement

As the spring of 1865 emerged there evolved a grim realization that the army of General Robert E. Lee was soon to falter. Near the end of March the Federal advantage became more acute as Lee held only thirty-five miles of entrenchment and his army totaled approximately 57,000; whereas, General U. S. Grant commanded a force of 129,000.¹

By March 29 General Philip Sheridan had led General Wesley Merritt's three cavalry divisions (totaling 13,000 men) toward Dinwiddie Court House.² This advance, along with the simultaneous

¹William Allan, "The Virginia Campaign of 1864-1865," Southern Historical Society Papers, XI (January-December, 1883), p. 458.

²Mark M. Boatner, The Civil War Dictionary (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1959), p. 282.

action of Grant's other corps, sought to force the Confederates out of their defenses at Petersburg. However, General Lee anticipated this maneuver and, so, dispatched General George Pickett with 19,000 men (infantry and cavalry) to Five Forks, five miles north of the Dinwiddie Court House.³

On April 1 the Battle of Five Forks commenced in the late afternoon and resulted in a Federal victory.⁴ Confederate losses were estimated at 5,200 including 3,200 who were taken prisoner. General Warren reported 634 men killed or wounded for his corps.⁵

One author claimed that, "This Federal victory and the loss it entailed on Lee insured his defeat."⁶ On Sunday, April 2, President Abraham Lincoln and General Grant met at City Point, Virginia, and conversed with regard to the strategy for the coming days. On that day the Sixth Corps of the Army of the Potomac attacked the center lines at Petersburg and the fall of Richmond came within a matter of hours.⁷ Lee then ordered a

³Ibid., p. 282.

⁴Ibid., pp. 283-284.

⁵Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants--A Study in Command (3 volumes, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), III, p. 671. Casualty reports for the other Union troops could not be ascertained.

⁶Allan, "Virginia Campaign," p. 458.

⁷Hazzard Stevens, "The Battle of Sailor's Creek," The Shenandoah Campaigns of 1862 and 1864 and The Appomattox Campaign of 1865 (Boston: Prepared by the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, 1907), p. 439. The above spelling of "Sailor's Creek" is incorrect and is often found in older Civil War books.

general retreat and sent the following dispatch to General J. C. Breckinridge, the Confederate Secretary of War, ". . . If I can I shall withdraw tonight north of the Appomattox [River] . . . Our only chance, then, of concentrating our forces is to do so near the Danville railway."⁸ The Amelia Court House (forty miles west of Richmond and on the direct road to Danville) was, therefore, to become the assembly point for all Confederate forces. There the ragged troops of Lee's army could obtain some supplies, and, more importantly, by utilizing the trains of the Danville railway the Confederates hoped that they might unite with General Joseph Johnston's army in North Carolina.⁹

The mass retreat was initiated on the night of April 2. The Army of Northern Virginia now numbered only about 27,000 to 31,000. It was divided into five small corps of four infantry and one cavalry commanded by generals James Longstreet, Richard Anderson, Richard Ewell, and John Gordon; Fitzhugh Lee commanded the cavalry unit.¹⁰ Also retreating toward the Amelia Court

The area was originally named Sayler's Creek after a local family. But some historians have named the Creek otherwise after a detachment of the Confederate Navy that fought there on April 6.

⁸Jethro Hotchkiss, Confederate Military History - Virginia (5 volumes, Atlanta: Confederate Publishing Company, 1899), II, p. 546.

⁹Walter C. Watson, "Sailor's Creek," Southern Historical Society Papers, XLIII (October, 1917), p. 139.

¹⁰Thomas L. Livermore, "The Generalship of the Appomattox Campaign," The Shenandoah Campaigns of 1862 and 1864 and The Appomattox Campaign of 1865 (Boston: Prepared by the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, 1907), p. 492, and Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 140. Both sources were utilized to obtain the strength then of Lee's army.

House were the remnants of George Pickett's and Bushrod Johnson's divisions, which had been routed at Five Forks.¹¹

"From the beginning it was apparent that Lee, in his retreat, was making for Amelia Court House, where his columns north and south of the Appomattox River could join, and where, no doubt, he expected to meet supplies."¹² General Grant discovered the route of the Confederate retreat on April 3; and he, consequently, ordered all units south of the Appomattox River to advance westward.¹³ From his Petersburg headquarters Grant sent the following dispatch to Sheridan: "The first object of the present movement will be to intercept Lee's army and second to secure Burkeville (Burkeville is situated adjacent to the Southside Railroad near Rice's Station). . . I want to cut off as much of Lee's army as possible."¹⁴ Sheridan responded rapidly, and by midday of April 4 he had reached Jetersville (near Amelia) with two cavalry divisions which totaled some 6,900 men. In addition Sheridan instructed the Fifth Corps, commanded by General Charles Griffin, to position themselves so as to block Lee's continued withdrawal westward.¹⁵

¹¹Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 139.

¹²Philip Sheridan, The Personal Memoirs of Philip H. Sheridan (New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1888), p. 174.

¹³Livermore, "Generalship of the Appomattox Campaign," p. 490.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 490.

¹⁵Boatner, Dictionary, p. 723 and Livermore, "Generalship of the Appomattox Campaign," p. 491. These two sources were used in connection with Sheridan's response to Grant's order.

Other Federal units continued to pursue the retreating Confederate army. The commanding general of the Army of the Potomac, General Joseph Meade, with General Andrew Humphrey's Second Corps and General Horatio Wright's Sixth Corps, moved by the Namozine road to the south bank of the Appomattox River. General Edward Ord, with the Ninth and Twenty-fourth corps, positioned the troops by the Southside Railroad. They hoped to capture the Confederate army.¹⁶

Meanwhile the Confederate army reached Amelia Court House on April 5, but the expected supplies of 200,000 rations were not there.¹⁷ Lack of provisions caused Lee to issue a request to the local citizens for food, and he also sent word to Danville to rush the requested supplies to Amelia. While awaiting the provisions, the Confederates searched the countryside for food. Lee reported to President Jefferson Davis later that, "nearly 24 hours were lost in endeavoring to collect subsistence for men and horses. The delay was fatal and could not be retrieved."¹⁸ Nevertheless the request for supplies never reached Danville as one of Sheridan's men captured the Confederate messenger with a note signed by Lee's Commissary-General telling of the desperate need of food supplies. Sheridan had also captured the Danville railway on April 4.¹⁹

¹⁶Stevens, "Battle of Sailor's Creek," p. 440.

¹⁷Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 139.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁹Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, p. 175.

It soon became apparent to General Lee that the position at Amelia Court House was endangered. On Wednesday, April 5, Longstreet and Lee rode with a reconnaissance party to inspect the situation and decided that the Federal forces were too strong to overrun.²⁰ By this time Sheridan had assembled 49,000 infantrymen (three corps) and 6,900 members of two cavalry corps.²¹ In addition to the scouting report, another incident was to confirm Lee's suspicions of the Union strength. Toward the evening of April 5, the Confederates captured a Federal agent near the vicinity of the Court House. Upon searching the prisoner they discovered a document which revealed that a portion of Grant's army was within striking distance.²² Therefore Lee decided that night to move his unfed army from the Court House and by circuitous back roads he hoped to maneuver around the Union left through Deatonsville and Painesville to Prince Edward Court House.²³ From there Lee hoped to capture the Southside railway ahead of Grant's forces. This railroad could then be utilized as a retreat and also as an eventual means southward for unity with Johnston.²⁴ "Accordingly orders

²⁰Watson, "Sailor's Creek," pp. 140-141.

²¹Livermore, "Generalship of the Appomattox Campaign," p. 491.

²²Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, p. 698.

²³Joseph W. Keifer, Slavery and Four Years of War (2 volumes, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1900), II, pp. 203-204.

²⁴Hotchkiss, Military History, II, p. 547.

were issued directing the retreat upon Farmville, Longstreet to move in front, closely followed by Anderson, Ewell, and Gordon . . . and the cavalry [Fitzhugh Lee's men] to march where most needed."²⁵ In that order of march Lee rode with Longstreet's two divisions under General Charles Field and General William Mahone. A wagon train was placed between Ewell and Gordon.²⁶

Speed was of the essence and Lee saw to it that the column moved swiftly as he supervised the lead column by setting a fast pace of march.²⁷

This left General Ewell as the ranking officer of all the troops in the rear of Longstreet. However he was given no orders to exercise command over the other troops except some 3,000 of the Home Guard, which had accompanied him from Richmond.²⁸ Later that evening as the march was under way the Confederate wagon train destroyed ninety-eight caissons of ammunitions at Amelia because it would slow their march.²⁹

The Confederate army continued to march throughout the night stopping only to rest the wagon teams. On the morning of the sixth the advance section of the column reached Southside

²⁵Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 141.

²⁶Stevens, "Battle of Sailor's Creek," p. 442.

²⁷Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, p. 699.

²⁸Ibid., p. 699.

²⁹Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 141.

railroad at Rice's Station.³⁰ Yet the remainder of the column was plagued with the rains that flooded streams and made roads almost impassable. Consequently the line of retreat extended all the way back to Amelia Springs.³¹ Needless to say, the inclement weather played havoc with the Union movements as well.

Despite the impressive strength of 50,000 troops positioned in and around Jetersville, Sheridan was restless. As April 5 wore on and while awaiting Meade's infantry (the Second and Sixth Corps), Sheridan became concerned, because there had been no action from Confederate batteries. When Meade arrived at 2 p.m., Sheridan expressed his desire to march on Amelia Court House.³² However Meade did not approve and a note was sent to Grant appraising him of the situation (at that time Grant was between Nottoway Court House and Burkeville). A decision was made to advance on the Court House the following day.³³

The next morning (April 6) Meade's forces surrounded Amelia Court House. But as Sheridan had surmised, Lee had evacuated during the night.³⁴ Federal scouts soon reported that the rear of a large Confederate column had just passed the outer limits

³⁰Stevens, "Battle of Sailor's Creek," p. 442.

³¹Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 141.

³²Livermore, "Generalship of the Appomattox Campaign," p. 491-492.

³³Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 142.

³⁴Stevens, "Battle of Sailor's Creek," p. 442.

of Amelia Springs. Now the Union troops changed their direction of attack and Andrew Humphreys' Second Corps was ordered to pursue the retreating column directly on the road by Amelia Springs.³⁵ General Sheridan, with three divisions of cavalry commanded by generals Wesley Merritt, George Custer, and George Crook (totaling some 13,000) broke from the cumbersome pace of Meade's Army and proceeded west toward Rice's station.³⁶ Wright's Sixth Corps marched through Jetersville and was ordered to follow Sheridan's cavalry to Deatonsville.³⁷

II. The Confrontation

Upon approaching Deatonsville Sheridan's men came upon the Confederate column passing through that town, but this section of the line of retreat was too closely guarded, and orders were, consequently, given to wait and locate a weak spot in the column before striking. A weak link was soon discovered by the Federals approximately two miles southwest of Deatonsville, where the road to Rice branches off to the south across Sayler's Creek.³⁸

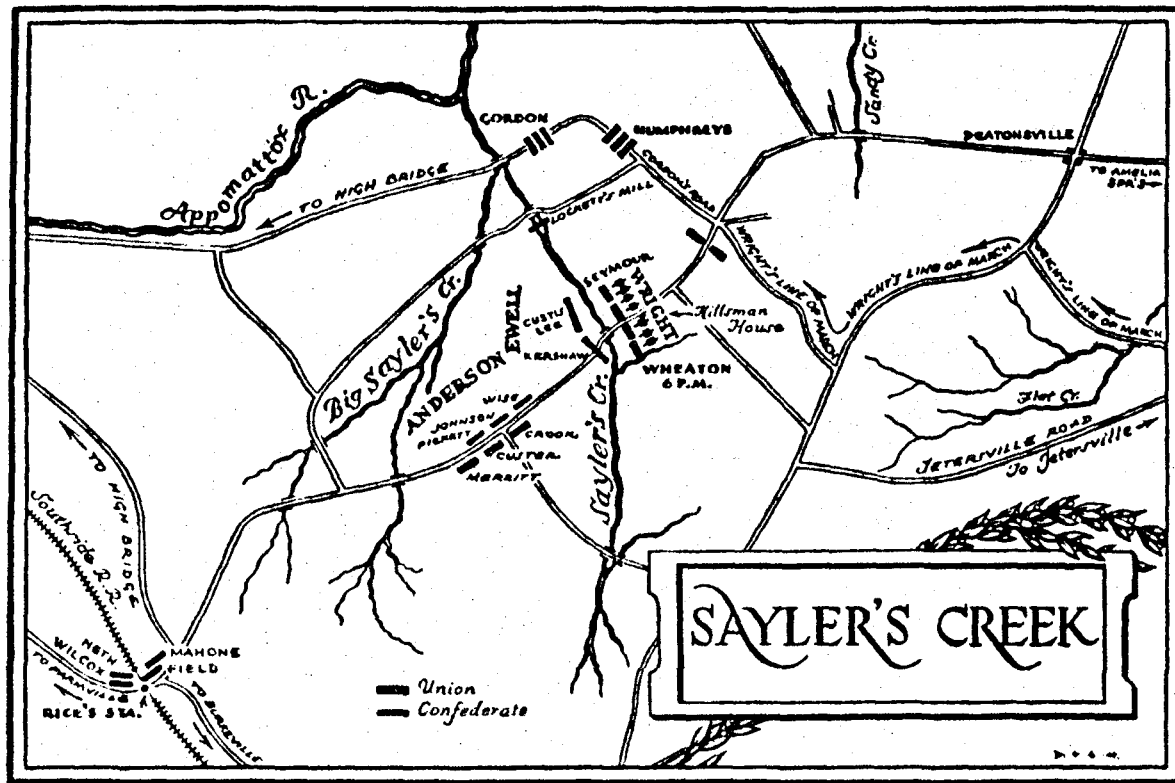
With the Union cavalry engaging in "hit and run" tactics on the Confederate column, Generals Ewell, Anderson, and Gordon

³⁵Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 142.

³⁶Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, p. 179.

³⁷Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 142.

³⁸Ibid., p. 143.



moved the wagons between the units of Ewell and Gordon forward so as to coordinate their respective forces more effectively in the event of an attack.³⁹ To enable the wagons to pass, Ewell and Anderson halted their divisions by the roadside.

"Then occurred the first of the mistakes that showed how exhaustion was destroying command."⁴⁰ When Anderson halted his

division, he failed to notify the unit (General Mahone's) in front of him. Mahone's forces thus continued to march with Longstreet's command unaware that a dangerous gap had been

established.⁴¹ Spotting the opening General Custer sent his division into the column, "where [they] charged and routed the forces guarding the enemy's wagon train, capturing over 300 wagons."⁴² Custer was soon joined by the cavalry divisions of Crook and Merritt, and together they succeeded in establishing a roadblock that isolated the entire rear portion of Lee's army.⁴³

Confusion increased in the Confederate ranks with a message from Gordon. He, as commander of the rearguard, urged that the march continue as his troops were being heavily pressed by the

³⁹Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, p. 700.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 701.

⁴¹Boatner, Dictionary, p. 723.

⁴²The War of the Rebellion - A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. (128 volumes, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. XLVI, p. 910.

⁴³Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, p. 180.

Federals (Humphreys' Second Corps). At first Anderson balked at moving the line of retreat, but he soon concurred with Ewell.⁴⁴ They decided, in an effort to speed up the column, to divert the remainder of the wagons between Ewell's front and rear to a road less exposed. The wagons thus turned right, or north, into the Jamestown Road that led to the Double Bridges.⁴⁵ But in issuing the route change order for the wagons no one apparently informed Gordon that he must continue on the southwest road and join Ewell's force.⁴⁶ This second major blunder by the Confederates sacrificed Ewell's rearguard and made him vulnerable to the advancing Union infantry that had followed Sheridan's cavalry.

"The complete isolation of Ewell from Longstreet in his front and Gordon in his rear led to the Battle of Sailor's [sic] Creek, one of the severest conflicts of the war."⁴⁷ Sheridan's charge into the gap between the units of Longstreet and Anderson caused Anderson to deploy his troops. Anderson's corps consisted of the remainder of Pickett's, Henry Wise's, and Bushrod Johnson's divisions, which totaled perhaps six thousand men. This force was opposed by the three divisions of Sheridan's cavalry, approximately 13,000.⁴⁸ Behind Johnson's division came Custis Lee's

⁴⁴Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, p. 701.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 702.

⁴⁶Stevens, "Battle of Sailor's Creek," p. 443.

⁴⁷Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, pp. 180-181.

⁴⁸Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 144.

division, which formed the first portion of Ewell's command.⁴⁹

Farther down the column at Sayler's Creek, General Fitzhugh Lee informed Ewell that a large force of Federal Cavalry held the road just in front of General Anderson. Ewell then stated, "General Anderson suggested two modes of escape--either to unite our forces and break through, or to move to the right through the woods and try to strike a road which ran toward Farmville."⁵⁰

By this time Ewell had positioned his oddly assorted force of about three thousand men above the western bank of Sayler's Creek.⁵¹ Nonetheless on reviewing the situation to this point one historian-observer had this to say, "Here then was a critical situation of the retreat. Lee's object of course, was not to fight battles, but to reach Carolina with as much of his army as could possibly escape. Now the line of retreat had been cut in two; and a third of his army was surrounded north, east, and south."⁵²

Being cornered on three sides, the Confederates braced themselves for the expected assault by the pursuing Federals. It has been generally agreed upon that the Confederate forces positioned at Sayler's Creek numbered in the proximity of ten thousand troops. Of this number Ewell held some 3,600 men and

⁴⁹Official Records, Series I, Vol. XLVI, p. 1289.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 1294.

⁵¹Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, p. 703.

⁵²Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 145.

Anderson commanded close to 6,400.⁵³ With regard to the relative components of these two corps, Ewell had two small divisions with a varied assortment of other military personnel.⁵⁴ The two commanders of the divisions under Ewell were generals Custis Lee and Joseph Kershaw. Lee's division, which included assorted units such as the Chaffin's Bluff Battalion, the Eighteenth Georgia, and a naval brigade of two thousand commanded by Admiral John R. Tucker, positioned themselves facing the Creek; and on the left of the road leading to Rice, General Kershaw's division, which had three brigadier commanding officers in generals J. P. Simms, Benjamin Humphreys, and Dudley DuBose, set upon the right side of the road. His force was supplemented by a unit of artillery under the command of Colonel Stapleton Crutchfield and Major Robert Stiles.⁵⁵ These men were armed as infantry and Ewell exclaimed later, "I had no artillery, all being with the [wagon] train."⁵⁶ There was no post battle report from Anderson concerning the actions of his troops.⁵⁷ Nevertheless certain things can be ascertained such as the fact that he (Anderson) had three divisions under his command headed by

⁵³Stevens, "Battle of Sailor's Creek," p. 448.

⁵⁴Keifer, Four Years of War, II, p. 208.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 208, and Watson, "Sailor's Creek, p. 145, and Official Records, Series I, Vol. XLVI, p. 1284. All were used in determining the units under Ewell.

⁵⁶Official Records, Series I, Vol. XLVI, p. 1295.

⁵⁷Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 147.

Generals Pickett, Johnson, and Wise in that respective order of march toward Rice's station. They were positioned or, more accurately, blocked by the Federal cavalry approximately two miles ahead of Ewell's position.⁵⁸

Massing near and around the trapped Southern forces were approximately forty thousand Federal troops. Included were the Sixth Infantry Corps, a battery of artillery cannons (thirty guns--approximately), a portion of the Union Second Corps, and Sheridan's cavalry. Under Sheridan's command were three divisions headed by Generals Custer, Crook, and Merritt.⁵⁹

At approximately four o'clock in the afternoon, Wright's artillery set up their guns at the Hillsman House, which looked down upon Ewell's force, some eight hundred yards away. At this time, General Ewell left his command and went to confer with Anderson on a plan of battle. They decided that Anderson would attack the front while Ewell was to hold back the Federals in the rear of the beleaguered Confederate column.⁶⁰ With a successful attack Anderson concluded that the way would once again be cleared for the continuation of the march. However just as Anderson began to organize for the attack, the Federal artillery opened up from the Hillsman House and rained shrapnel

⁵⁸Philip Van Doren Stern, An End to Valor (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1958), p. 104.

⁵⁹Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 138, and Stevens, "Battle of Sailor's Creek," p. 448. These two sources gave the components of Federal troops in the battle area.

⁶⁰Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, p. 704.

upon Ewell's troops.⁶¹ The sound of the big guns signaled other Union forces into action and Sheridan's cavalry struck the entrenched forces under Anderson. General Joseph Staggs then led the Sixth Corps infantry against Ewell's forces. This Union corps charged through and maneuvered around the right flank of Ewell (Kershaw's division).⁶² On Ewell's left flank, Union General Truman Seymour also attacked with the start of the artillery barrage. Yet Custis Lee's division maintained their defensive positions.

The Federals were attempting to envelope the Confederates by initiating a two-pronged assault. But whether this action affected the South's next move, a counter-attack, cannot be ascertained. Apparently a portion of Ewell's troops charged the center of the oncoming Union infantry, but did so without any unison or any planned objective.⁶³ Records revealed that no Southern officer of significant rank directed this attack, and, as might be deduced, the attempt failed because the Confederates drove too deeply into the Union line. Consequently they were not in a position to defend the ground that they had just captured, and soon the advance broke off into general confusion. While the counter-attack was initiated by the Confederates the right and left of the Union line disregarded the apparent defeat of

⁶¹Boatner, Dictionary, p. 724.

⁶²Ibid., p. 724, and Official Records, Series I, Vol. XLVI, p. 1283.

⁶³Keifer, Four Years of War, II, p. 208.

their center and pressed on towards envelopment.⁶⁴ Soon General Simms's Brigade, the right flank element of Kershaw's Division, was overwhelmed by the Federals. Here Simms assumed that Anderson must have been defeated and so gave the order to retreat and every man for himself.⁶⁵

Accounts of the Battle of Saylor's Creek seemed to generalize; yet considering the numerical armament and supply advantages that the Federals enjoyed as compared to the ill-equipped and ill-fed Confederates, the outcome of this engagement was not surprising. Anderson's biographer reportedly alleged that he sought to unite with Ewell and "drive the enemy off the road, but the troops seemed to be wholly broken down and disheartened. After a feeble effort to advance they gave way in confusion."⁶⁶ General Ewell, however, who had left his troops before the Federal guns began their bombardment, made no mention of any effort by both corps to unite. Nevertheless Ewell actually rode with Anderson's attempted charge forward against the Federal roadblock. Ewell stated later,

Just as it [Sixth Corps Infantry] attacked General Anderson made his assault, which was repulsed in 5 minutes. I had ridden up near his lines with him to see the result when a staff officer, who had followed his troops in his charge, brought him word of its failure. General Anderson rode rapidly toward his

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 208-209.

⁶⁵Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, p. 703.

⁶⁶C. I. Walker, Life of Lt. General Richard Heron Anderson of the Confederate States Army (Charleston: Art Publishing Company, 1917), p. 209.

command. I returned to mine to see if it were too late to try the other plan of escape.⁶⁷

Ewell attempted to return to his command, which by this time was almost enveloped. Upon riding toward his left flank, he ran into an advancing line of Federal infantry. Ewell, realizing that his left flank was being closed by advancing Federals, that his right flank (Kershaw) had been enveloped, and that Anderson's divisions were in complete disorder and retreat, surrendered. The Southern general then asked that a Confederate messenger be sent to his division commander, Custis Lee. Ewell later stated, "I had surrendered, and he [Custis Lee] had better do so too, to prevent useless loss of life, though I gave no orders, being a prisoner. Before the message reached him, General Lee had been captured, as had General Kershaw, and the whole of my command."⁶⁸ Lee's division held the only remaining semblance of order, but when Kershaw's men were put to flight his troops were practically cut off from the rest of the Confederate army and so the general yielded to the inevitable.

After the futile attempt to attack Sheridan's cavalry, General Anderson's corps dissipated into mass confusion.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Official Records, Series I, Vol XLVI, p. 1295.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 1295.

⁶⁹Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, p. 706. The author expressed some doubt as to whether Pickett's men fought or simply fled. He was probably reflecting a bit upon General Pickett's alleged poor leadership at Five Forks, plus his permitting a gap to be established between his and Mahone's divisions.

Remnants of General Pickett's division (some six hundred) fought their way through the Union roadblock and continued on toward Farmville. Also during the fray it was reported that most of General Wise's division circled around the Federals and proceeded upon the planned retreat. Anderson, himself, plus another of his division commanders, General Johnson, also managed to escape the Federal trap.⁷⁰ The latter's division, as ordered later by General Robert E. Lee, incorporated the scattered soldiers from Anderson's and Ewell's commands. Johnson's division suffered few casualties, and so they were in a position to operate on a kind of salvage mission. After waiting until darkness these troops made their way to the Farmville rendezvous sector.⁷¹

While history generally refers to the Battle of Sayler's Creek as being between the Federal forces, Wright and Sheridan, and the Confederate troops, Anderson and Ewell, there was still another battle that commenced in that area on the same day. General John B. Gordon of the Confederate army had been instructed to guard the rear of the column of march; yet he had reservations about his assignment as later revealed in his memoirs. "To bring up the rear," he said, "and adequately protect the retreating army was an impossible task . . . On and on, hour after hour, the lines were alternately forming,

⁷⁰Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 147.

⁷¹Official Records, Series I, Vol. XLVI, p. 1290.

fighting, and retreating, making one almost continuous shifting battle."⁷² Nevertheless upon the Confederate change in their retreat route, General Grant assigned General Andrew Humphreys and the Second Corps of some 18,000 men to pursue and then to attack the retreating column from the rear.⁷³

After traveling eleven or twelve miles, the Confederates came to a fork in the road to Rice. Anderson and Ewell then gave the order to divert the wagons to the north fork, Jamestown Road, to enhance the speed of the column.

Gordon, whether through ignorance of the roads, or to protect the wagon train already sent before on that road, or to avoid the enemy he now saw massing on his left, cannot be learned, when he reached the forks mentioned, instead of following the road across Sailor's Creek behind Ewell [,] turned off to his right on the Jamestown Road towards the Double Bridges.⁷⁴

Though the above account is probably a correct summation of the factors Gordon had to consider, the failure of Anderson and Ewell to notify Gordon that he was to continue on the road to Rice has been generally professed by historians as the major cause for this blunder.

The mistake was made and Humphreys continued to pursue the Confederates under Gordon. At the point of the fork, the Second Corps had already fought, a "sharp running fight . . .

⁷²John B. Gordon, Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. 423.

⁷³Livermore, "Generalship of the Appomattox Campaign," pp. 491-492.

⁷⁴Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 144.

which was continued over a distance of fourteen miles."⁷⁵ The chase lasted perhaps another mile or two before the harrassed Southerners made a final stand at Perkinson Mills, located approximately two miles north of where Anderson and Ewell were engaged.⁷⁶

At Perkinson Mills, Gordon engaged a Union force of 18,000 men.⁷⁷ His troops numbered approximately 2,100, and practically the entire force was killed or taken prisoner--Gordon and a few others escaped capture under the cover of darkness.⁷⁸

There was really no hope for the column, unless it remained together and fought in a united effort. When Gordon strayed from the main group, he was thoroughly and quickly defeated. Furthermore, "The reason Gordon received no help at Sayler's Creek was a tragic one: the army had no reserves. Ewell and Anderson were quite occupied and Longstreet remained at Rice, Mahone's Division thus had been the only one available for service anywhere."⁷⁹

All the action about Sayler's Creek took place within a radius of three miles. The casualty figures were quite unbalanced and left no doubt as to who emerged victorious.

⁷⁵Andrew A. Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), p. 381.

⁷⁶Boatner, Dictionary, p. 725.

⁷⁷Livermore, "Generalship of the Appomattox Campaign," pp. 491-492.

⁷⁸Official Records, Series I, Vol. XLVI, p. 381.

⁷⁹Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, p. 711.

General Ewell's Corps suffered the largest loss of killed, wounded or captured. Of the approximate 3,600 troops commanded by Ewell, some 3,400 fell victim to the Federals mostly by way of capture (150 of these were killed or wounded).⁸⁰ From this total General Custis Lee lost about 1,600 men, practically the entire division. General Kershaw's division lost all except 250 men, although Kershaw stated, "My losses in killed and wounded must have been considerable, but I have no means of estimating the number."⁸¹ In addition to the above figures, the Naval Brigade led by Commodore Tucker, who was assigned to Ewell's division, suffered the heaviest loss in killed and wounded. This brigade was placed at an exposed position across the end of the open field facing the Hillsman House, and consequently they received the brunt of the firepower from the thirty Union guns.⁸² The brigade had reportedly 2,000 men, but their losses were not included in Ewell's casualty total. As opposed to Ewell's staggering losses, General Wright and his Sixth Corps lost only 442 men killed and wounded.⁸³

The Anderson Corps of 6,400 lost 2,600 men, and again the majority of the latter figure was through capture. In that division, General Johnson probably lost 1,000, and in Pickett's

⁸⁰Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign, pp. 383-384.

⁸¹Official Records, Series I, Vol. XLVI, p. 1284.

⁸²Stevens, "Battle of Sailor's Creek," p. 448.

⁸³Official Records, Series I, Vol. XLVI, p. 909.

division of 2,500 only 1,000 men escaped capture. The third division of Anderson's Corps, General Wise's division, seemed to yield comparatively light losses with a casualty figure of 400 to 500.⁸⁴ A comparison of Union losses here is not too significant, because General Sheridan reported his losses at 1,472 from March 29 to April 9 without separating the casualty number from the encounter at Sayler's Creek.⁸⁵ However a former staff member of Custis Lee's claimed that generals Sheridan and Custer stated that one thousand Union cavalry men were killed or wounded.⁸⁶

General Humphreys reported the following gains made by the Second Corps against those of General Gordon: "The captives of the corps were 13 flags, four guns, and 1,700 prisoners. The enemy's killed and wounded probably exceeded our own and their total loss could not have been less than 2,000."⁸⁷ General Humphreys listed his losses at 250 casualties.⁸⁸

Thus in compiling the casualty and prisoners figure taken by the North, the Confederacy lost approximately 7,700 at the battle. Among the Confederates captured were generals Ewell, Kershaw, Custis Lee, DuBose, Eppa Hunton, and Montgomery Corse.

⁸⁴Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign, p. 384.

⁸⁵Watson, "Saylor's Creek," p. 150.

⁸⁶McHenry Howard, "Closing Scenes of the War About Richmond," Southern Historical Society Papers, XXXI (October, 1903), p. 144.

⁸⁷Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign, p. 381.

⁸⁸Official Records, Series I, Vol. XLVI, p. 682.

The Federal forces lost an estimated 1,180 men, including 170 killed.⁸⁹ The Confederate figure of 7,700 men lost represented about one-third of the number that had departed from Amelia the previous day.⁹⁰

III. Lessons Learned from the Battle

Though the outcome of the war had been decided before April 6 and even before the start of the Appomattox Campaign, this battle was important in the story of the Civil War. One historian commenting on the Battle of Sayler's Creek stated that, "It may truthfully be said that it was not only the last general field battle of the war, but the one wherein more officers and men were captured . . . than in any battle of the war."⁹¹ When Anderson's and Ewell's troops were captured the Army of Northern Virginia lost two of its four remaining corps.⁹² However perhaps a more significant aspect of history can be drawn from this experience. By April the Confederate troops were by and large a thoroughly dispirited mass. The Confederate actions at Sayler's Creek demonstrate Freeman's assertion that low morale and exhaustion helped to undermine command.⁹³ Nevertheless

⁸⁹Boatner, Dictionary, p. 724.

⁹⁰Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, p. 710.

⁹¹Keifer, Four Years of War, II, p. 214.

⁹²Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, p. 707.

⁹³Ibid., p. 701.

in the heat of the battle with unfamiliar terrain about the Confederates (as some people have expressed) and the awesome array of Union troops, one ponders as to what, even a fresh division of Confederates could have done to alter the situation.

CHAPTER II

ESTABLISHMENT OF PARKS ON THE STATE LEVEL

The following morning, April 7, the fields of Sayler's Creek were again filled with activity. While the victorious Federals continued their pursuit of Lee's army, the captured Confederates were hurried away on a march to City Point and to the prison there.¹ Appointed Union troops and local citizens consisting mainly of slaves, elderly people, and young children formed a burying detail. Because the day was oppressively hot and humid the Federal surgeons ordered the group to bury the Confederate and Union dead as quickly as possible. The Hillsman House, formerly utilized by the Federals as an artillery outpost, now was converted into a field hospital. Dr. S. Lidell, Medical Director for the Army of the Potomac, reported that there were 481 men treated at the House of whom 161 were Confederates.²

With the surrender at Appomattox, Sayler's Creek returned to normalcy and also obscurity in the eyes of many post-war analysts. Though local interest continued regarding the battle, the day that this battlefield was to acquire recognition remained many years away. Reliving these events at Sayler's Creek certainly would not have been possible without the creation of

¹Watson, "Sailor's Creek," p. 149.

²Ibid., p. 150.

a state park system. Therefore tracing the origin and development of such a system that seeks to preserve our nations's historical and natural lands bears direct importance to the establishment of the Sayler's Creek Battlefield Park.

I. Early Attempts at Conservation

America today is one of the foremost among the countries of the world in preserving for its citizens choice examples of their land.³ As early as 1832 Congress had demonstrated a faint interest in the public ownership of lands valuable for social use. In that year Hot Springs Reservation, Arkansas, was created as a health resort by an act of Congress.⁴ Although Hot Springs is often referred to as the nation's first national park, this apparently is a misnomer. The resort was administered solely by the Secretary of the Interior and no conservation agency or park service was existent then. Furthermore the act of 1832 "made no mention of the preservation of natural curiosities in their original state, the protection of wild life, the public pleasure--ground feature, or of any of the elements of the national park idea."⁵

³Freeman Tilden, The National Parks (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), p. 339.

⁴Reynold E. Carlson, Theodore Deppe, and Janet Maclean, Recreation in American Life (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1963), p. 275.

⁵Jenks Cameron, The National Park Service (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), pp. 5-6.

From the 1850's onward, there came strange, wonderful and almost unbelievable tales of explorers who had travelled the vast reaches of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho. Therefore in 1869 an expedition was undertaken to investigate the rumors of this region. Upon returning, the main participants, D. E. Folsom, C. W. Cook, and William Peterson, made such enthusiastic reports of the region that an Army Corps of Engineers was dispatched immediately.⁶ Their reports confirmed the previous ones saying essentially that this area must be preserved to protect its natural beauty. Consequently in 1872 an act of dedication created Yellowstone National Park.⁷

From 1872 to 1890 Yellowstone was "the national park."⁸ Then in the next decade eleven more areas were established. Among the more notable parks were the Sequoia, Yosemite, and Kings Canyon National Parks.⁹ For administrative purposes these areas were placed under the jurisdiction of Yellowstone and the Hot Springs Reservation.¹⁰

Despite the formation of some parks in the Nineteenth Century an active program to preserve wilderness areas for both conservation and recreation did not receive substantial

⁶Ibid., pp. 2-3.

⁷Carlson, Recreation, p. 275.

⁸Tilden, National Parks, p. 342.

⁹Ibid., p. 342.

¹⁰Cameron, National Park Service, p. 6.

emphasis until the beginning of the Twentieth Century.¹¹ To establish a strong program of conservation, additional legislation was necessary. In June of 1906 largely due to the promotional efforts of Congressman John F. Lacey of Iowa, the Antiquities Act was passed by Congress.¹² This legislation gave the President the authority to set aside any lands owned or controlled by the United States government containing "historic landmarks, historic or prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest."¹³ Theodore Roosevelt was instrumental in making the people conscious of the need to protect a portion of America's land from commercial exploitation--private or public. An example of this came in 1902 when Roosevelt vetoed a bill that would have made Muscle Shoals, later the center of the T.V.A. (Tennessee Valley Authority), susceptible to private development.¹⁴ During this period Roosevelt rehabilitated the Forestry Service through the leadership of Gifford Pinchot. Soon after recommending to the to the Inland Waterways Commission (1907) that it plan for a "multi-purpose river valley development," Roosevelt extended

¹¹Wildland Research Center, Wilderness and Recreation - A Report on Resources, Values and Problems (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), p. 18.

¹²John Ise, Our National Park Policy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), p. 157.

¹³Cameron, National Park Service, p. 7.

¹⁴William H. Harbaugh, "Theodore Roosevelt," American Peoples Encyclopedia (20 volumes, New York: Grolier, Incorporated, 1966), XVI, p. 155.

invitations to state and territorial governors for a National Conference on Conservation.¹⁵ Results of the conference included a unanimous declaration of all the governors on the subject of conservation, the appointment of thirty-six state conservation commissions and the creation of a National Conservation Commission. The National Commission consisted of forty-nine members who surveyed the nations's resources and made their first report in January of 1909. The establishment of this inventory was made possible by an Executive order which placed the resources of the government departments at the command of the **commission**.¹⁷ When Roosevelt left office, over 172,000,000 acres of land were set aside for some type of conservation work.¹⁸

Throughout Roosevelt's campaign for conservation, the parks did suffer mainly because no legislation was enacted to establish a park agency, and consequently the parks were more of a conglomerated mass.¹⁹ Organization and revenue were in sad disrepair. To complicate matters opposition groups of wealthy landowners were against any legislation that would set aside, or in their words, "tie up," large tracts of land.²⁰ However

¹⁵Ibid., p. 155, and Theodore Roosevelt, An Autobiography (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 409.

¹⁶Roosevelt, An Autobiography, p. 409.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 409.

¹⁸John D. Hicks, The American Nation (Boston, New York: Houghton - Mifflin Company, 1941), pp. 397-398.

¹⁹Cameron, National Park Service, p. 12.

²⁰Ise, Park Policy, p. 152.

by 1910 the national parks saw hope of some central administration. Secretary of the Interior, Richard A. Ballinger, urged that a Bureau of National Parks be established.²¹ Popular interest in a park system was aroused in 1915 when a National Parks Portfolio was distributed to the public. This report explained the need for a well-organized park system which could then provide better recreation for everyone.²² This campaign culminated in the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916 with Stephen T. Mather as its first director. Its official duties were to administer, promote, and regulate the use of national parks and monuments.²³

The policy of the National Park Service was enumerated in the following three principles: (1) National Parks must be maintained in absolutely unimpaired form; (2) They are to be set apart for the use, observation, and pleasure of the people; and (3) National interest must dictate all decisions affecting public or private enterprise in the parks.²⁴ Their organization covered a wide span of activities. A section entitled administration was responsible for the supervision and management of the park and monuments under jurisdiction. Secondly, the parks utilized a field service which included such advisory personnel

²¹Elmo Richardson, The Politics of Conservation (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p. 251.

²²Cameron, National Park Service, p. 12.

²³Wildland Research Center, Wilderness, pp. 305-306.

²⁴Cameron, National Park Service, p. 12.

as park superintendents, rangers, civil and landscape engineers. The next section dealt with the editorial and publication of park booklets, reports, surveys, and maps. Finally the law department was concerned with the important business of interpreting and drawing up leases and contracts of parks to concessionaires and other interested parties.²⁵

II. National Conference on State Parks

During the early years of the National Park Service (1916 - 1919) there was no coordination between the Service, which supervised certain parks, forest and monument sites, and state agencies, which also maintained certain sites. By 1920 Stephen Mather professed that to spread the ideas of conservation, the federal government must in some way aid and supervise the "large and small areas of varying scenic and scientific excellence."²⁶ Resulting from one need to help state park programs and from pressures by local groups--the American Civic Association in particular--Mather began to discuss the possibility of calling a national conference of state parks. He soon received the enthusiastic approval of the Secretary of the Interior, John Barton Payne. Other important people who campaigned for the conference were Richard Lieber, Director of Conservation in

²⁵Ibid., pp. 60-62.

²⁶Harlean James (ed.), 25th Anniversary Yearbook - Park and Recreation Progress (Washington: Prepared by the National Conference on State Parks, 1946), p. 5.

Indiana; J. Horace McFarland, President of the American Civic Association; and Herbert Evison, of the Natural Parks Association of Seattle.²⁷ As a result of their effort a national conference on state parks was held at Des Moines, Iowa, on January 10 - 12, 1921.²⁸

The conference was attended by two hundred conservationists from twenty-nine states. At that time there were only nineteen state parks in operation. The first order of business was election of officers, and Secretary Payne was elected chairman with Mather as his immediate assistant-Vice Chairman. Discussions focused on the need for inter-state cooperation in planning for park systems. Special note was taken of the fact that the Southern States had set aside less than one per cent of their total land area for conservation and park purposes.³⁰ The question of finances proved to be a difficult one for these early park planners. In their first three years of existence they relied totally on private donations. However, in 1925 the National

²⁷Ibid., p. 5.

²⁸Freeman Tilden, The State Parks (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), pp. 4-5. Nevertheless, the January Conference was not the initial attempt at the creation of state park programs. In the fall of 1885 the dedication of the Niagara Falls State Reservation signaled an attempt by a state to preserve some of its land. By the early 1890's, New York had set aside much of the Adirondack and Catskill Mountains for park use. New York and New Jersey collaborated to prevent portions of the Palisades lands from being commercialized.

²⁹James, 25th Anniversary Yearbook, p. 5.

³⁰J. Frederick Steiner, Americans At Play (New York and London: McGraw - Hill Company, Inc., 1933), p. 36.

Conference on State Parks became associated with the American Civic Association and the American Institute of Park Executives. These agencies served to unify the association and helped to dispense the various grants bestowed upon the park conference.³¹

The National Conference on State Parks continued to meet yearly, and by 1928 state parks numbered 563 totaling in area approximately four and one-half million acres. Continued increases were noted in the Northeast while the South continued to lag in state park development.³² Factors for this growth were numerous and intermingled. The guidance of the conference, through its publications and its national and regional meetings, was definitely one cause for park increases.³³ Other explanations for expansion include an increasing population, greater mobility brought on by more automobiles, higher incomes, shorter work weeks, and paid vacations.³⁴ Finally the National Park Service aided the states toward developing their own park systems. In the 1920's there did not exist a defined contract between federal and state park agencies that designated the amounts of federal aid each state was to receive. Yet the Park Service did send teams of landscape specialists to survey projected park projects and to help in the initial phases of administration

³¹James, 25th Anniversary Yearbook, p. 7.

³²Steiner, Americans, p. 36.

³³James, 25th Anniversary Yearbook, p. 11.

³⁴Tilden, State Parks, p. 3.

and maintenance.³⁵

At the close of the decade, the national and some state parks systems were well established. Though there were deficiencies in areas such as federal aid to the state parks and state legislation that would limit private exploitation of scenic lands, both systems had their own agency and could now program for more extensive park networks.

III. State Park Development in Virginia

Prior to 1926 Virginia's conservation system was operated by several independent agencies known as the State Geological Commission, the Water Power and Development Commission, and the Office of the State Forester. In July of 1926 the State Commission on Conservation and Development was established with William E. Carson as its first executive secretary. The duties and responsibilities of the independent agencies were then transferred to the State Commission. Now Virginia possessed a single agency that could unify and coordinate future conservation projects.³⁶

The park movement in Virginia began in 1924 when Stephen Mather and Hubert A. Work, Secretary of the Interior, conferred on the possibility of establishing a park in the state. Secretary

³⁵Ibid., p. 16.

³⁶Department of Conservation and Economic Development, "Organization, Duties and Objectives of Virginia State Parks" (Richmond: Department of Conservation and Economic Development, 1958), p. 1.

Work then appointed a committee in December to survey and select a suitable area. After the study was completed the Blue Ridge Mountains between Front Royal and Waynesboro was chosen to be the first large national park on the east coast.³⁷ The acquisition of the area, which consisted of 3,870 separate tracts, proved to be a difficult task. However by the fall of 1927 area land owners began to donate land. Subsequent legislation followed by the General Assembly that aided in the establishment of the park.³⁸ In 1928 the Virginia Legislature appropriated 1.2 million dollars for the acquisition of Shenandoah land. In addition the Federal Government enacted two laws that led to the future development of a coordinated state park system in the state. Two Virginians, Representative David Temple and Senator Claude Swanson, introduced in 1928 identical bills in the House and Senate that would limit the area for the Shenandoah National Park.³⁹ Congress accepted the bill and passed the National Park Act authorizing the State Commission on Conservation and Development "to acquire by gift, purchase or exercise the right of Eminent Domain, lands for park purposes, and to convey or transfer such lands to the United States of America."⁴⁰ The

³⁷J. R. Lassiter, "Shenandoah National Park," The Commonwealth, III (July, 1936), pp. 9-10.

³⁸Ibid., p. 10.

³⁹Ise, Park Policy, pp. 257-258.

⁴⁰State Commission on Conservation and Development, National Park Act (Richmond: State Commission on Conservation and Development), 1928, p. 1.

second item of national legislation was prompted by William Carson, head of Virginia's State Commission on Conservation. By 1928 the Public Parks Condemnation Act became law, and it provided the state with the legal means to acquire land that was to be condemned or where a great number of claims of ownership were evident and it became impractical to ascertain precise boundary lines.⁴¹ With the passage of this legislation, the state conveyed the Blue Ridge area to the federal government for the construction of a national park.

Until 1928 the parks division of the Commission was concerned only with the acquisition of the Shenandoah National Park. Other portions of the state soon began to demand park facilities.⁴² In Richmond the Virginia Academy of Science, the Garden Club of Virginia, and the Izaak Walton Leagues gathered on December 17, 1929, to discuss the needs for parks and recreation in that area.⁴³ At this time there was a movement under way in the southwest part of Virginia for the establishment of an interstate park of 10,000 acres between Virginia and Kentucky at the Breaks of the Cumberland. In Norfolk, proclamations were heard and the Seashore State Park Association was formed. This organization began immediately

⁴¹State Commission on Conservation and Development, Public Parks Condemnation Law (Richmond: State Commission on Conservation and Development, 1929), p. 5.

⁴²R. E. Burson, "Our System of State Parks," The Commonwealth, II (February, 1935), p. 9.

⁴³James, 25th Anniversary Yearbook, p. 112.

to pressure the Commission for a seashore state park.⁴⁴ These forces soon necessitated a study by the Commission to determine the park needs of Virginia. To ascertain such needs, the study group surveyed all of the state parks systems in the East and concluded that the parks should be scenic, attractive, and geographically distributed. Certain shortcomings were also revealed by the investigation. A major error made by park networks was that the lands selected for park use were unsuitable for recreation being too small in area. Furthermore a large number of diminutive park facilities were found to operate on a more expensive level than one large tract of land. Therefore guidelines were instituted, and a state park had to have potential recreational facilities, plus at least one thousand acres.⁴⁵

"The first real movement to develop a park system for the state of Virginia was made in 1932."⁴⁶ The author of this statement was referring to the Richmond Battlefield Park and the 720 acres it gave to the state.⁴⁷ This organization had evolved from the Richmond Battlefield Markers Association headed by Tucker Harrison. In 1930 T. M. Carrington, John C. Easley, Douglas S. Freeman, and J. Ambler Johnston formed the Richmond Battlefield Corporation.⁴⁸ They issued stock which was subscribed

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 112.

⁴⁵Burson, "Our System," p. 9.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁸H. J. Eckenrode, "Building the Richmond Battlefield Park," The Commonwealth, II (July, 1935), p. 11.

by the citizens of Richmond. Soon they accumulated enough money to buy the land at Fort Harrison, Cold Harbor, and Drewry's Bluff. By 1932 the corporation held over 700 acres, but they did not have enough money during the depression to clear the areas for park use. So the corporation sought to solve the problem by turning the land over to the state. However the state had little money and only managed to erect some battlefield markers at Cold Harbor.⁴⁹

While the depression destroyed many businesses and people across the land it provided the foundation for the state park system of Virginia. A former park official made the following statement with regard to Virginia's parks during the depression: "The conditions under which further properties were acquired were unique. This program [Federal Emergency Conservation Program] made it possible to develop state park areas at practically no cost to the state."⁵⁰

In the throes of the depression President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought numerous ways to alleviate the serious unemployment condition that plagued America. In a message of March 21, 1933, Roosevelt spoke of the "three essentials" to ease this situation: Grants to the states for relief, a system of public works, and a Civilian Conservation Corps.⁵¹ A month later, the

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 11.

⁵⁰Burson, "Our System," p. 10.

⁵¹Rexford G. Tugwell, The Democratic Roosevelt (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1957), p. 228.

President called a meeting to announce a program that would provide emergency work for the unemployed as well as to further develop conservation and park systems of the various states. At this time the Civilian Conservation Corps was not designated the task of building the state parks, but park officials began to ask for the establishment of C.C.C. camps in their respective parks and so the task was assigned.⁵²

Virginia's William Carson applied for two C.C.C. camps to be stationed at Fort Harrison and Cold Harbor.⁵³ As the federal government began to construct the C.C.C. camps in the Richmond Battlefield Park the State Commission realized that it had not the finances to complete work on the parks. The federal government (National Park Service), which had already been given control of the proposed Fredericksburg and Petersburg battlefield parks, was the only agency capable of the task. Consequently in 1934 Senator Harry F. Byrd introduced a bill in Congress that would cede the Richmond park to the National Park Service.⁵⁴

When the year (1933) ended the Park Service had granted Virginia six land tracts totaling 12,500 acres for future development as park areas. Fifteen C.C.C. camps were allocated to Virginia for the construction of the parks.⁵⁵ From July 1, 1933,

⁵²Burson, "Our System," p. 10.

⁵³Eckenrode, "Building Battlefield Park," p. 4.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 12.

⁵⁵Burson, "Our System," p. 10.

to January 1, 1935, five million dollars in federal funds were appropriated for Virginia park development.⁵⁶ The new year (1934) witnessed the opening of the Skyline Drive through the central and northern sections of the Shenandoah Park. The Park Service had given a reported two million dollars for the project, and the C.C.C. played an important role by constructing trails, picnic areas, and shrubbery along the Skyline Drive.⁵⁷

The year, 1936, was a memorable one for Virginia's park officials and conservationists. When Director Mather initiated the Conference on State Parks, he promised future aid in a number of ways to the state systems. One of these help methods was the Park, Parkway, and Recreation-Area Study Act of 1936. This legislation enabled and empowered the National Park Service to make studies and surveys of the various park and recreation systems of the United States. In addition the Park Study Act provided the legal basis for cooperation between federal, state, and local governments in planning their park and recreation programs.⁵⁸

In June of 1936 six state parks of Virginia were opened to the public. Each park was strategically placed so that Virginians would not have to travel any great distance to find recreation in the form of swimming, camping, horseback riding,

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 11.

⁵⁷Lassiter, "Shenandoah," pp. 11-12.

⁵⁸Tilden, National Parks, p. 343.

boating, and other such popular pastimes. Located on the Chesapeake Bay, in Princess Anne County, was Seashore State Park. The park covers 2,726 acres and has unique lake facilities in that there are two water frontages - two miles on the Chesapeake Bay and some ten square miles of inland lakes.⁵⁹ Moving to southside Virginia on U.S. Route 58, the Staunton River State Park of 1,776 acres offers swimming, nature displays, and cabin facilities.⁶⁰ In Patrick County was Fairy Stone State Park; this park amasses an area of 5,000 acres and provides an 168-acre lake for the fishing enthusiasts.⁶¹ Continuing westward the Hungry Mother State Park on State Route 16 affords the park system's largest lake of 200 acres.⁶² Douthat State Park, nine miles east of Clifton Forge provides a wildlife display that is not equalled in the state.⁶³ Finally, Westmoreland State Park, in the Northern Tidewater, contains 1,300 acres and has a mile and one-quarter stretch of beach on the Potomac River.⁶⁴

⁵⁹Virginia Conservation Commission, Virginia's State Parks (Richmond: Division of Publicity of the Commission, 1937), p. 13.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 14.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 6.

⁶²Ibid., p. 9.

⁶³Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 15.

In 1938 four recreational areas, comprising 45,000 acres, developed by the Department of Agriculture through the Forestry Division were given to the state for operation and maintenance (i.e. there was no official transfer of title).⁶⁵ The agreement provided for the transfer of 23,000 acres in Appomattox and Buckingham Counties, 15,000 acres in Cumberland County, and 7,000 acres in Prince Edward County to the Commonwealth of Virginia. Besides the 45,000 acres that were to be used for the parks, 4,000 acres in Buckingham County were transferred to the Southern Appalachian Forest experiment station. This tract was later named the Robert E. Lee Forest.⁶⁶ Two years later the 45,000 acres were turned into scenic recreation parks. These parks were: (1) Goodwyn Lake and Prince Edward Lake in Prince Edward County; (2) Holliday Lake in Appomattox County; and (3) Bear Creek Lake in Cumberland County.⁶⁷

The Civilian Conservation Corps camps were dismantled in the fall of 1940 and Virginia emerged with a new system of recreation. As one park official stated, "Virginia is a typical example of the assistance rendered to states toward the achievement

⁶⁵Department of Conservation and Economic Development, "Origin and Development of Virginia's State Parks" (Richmond: Division of Publicity of the Department, 1958), p. 3.

⁶⁶Danville Register, Danville, Virginia, April 15, 1938.

⁶⁷Department of Conservation and Economic Development, "Origin and Development," p. 3. Recreation areas differ from state parks. The former contains no overnight, housekeeping accommodations and the day-use facilities and programs are not as extensive as those of the parks.

of a park system. In 1933 this state had only one state park. Through the aid of the Federal Government (C.C.C.), by 1942, eleven areas had been developed. . . . Road systems, water supply, power lines, and all the necessary structures had been in the six principal areas [six parks that opened in 1936]."⁶⁸

The agency for conservation in Virginia, the State Commission on Conservation and Development, was changed by the Reorganization Act of 1948. The act changed the nomenclature of the Commission to the Department of Conservation and Development. Next the legislation fixed the organization, scope, and duties of each of the six divisions within the department.⁶⁹ With regard to the Division of State Parks, the chief executive officer was designated to be the Commissioner. This man is appointed by the Director of the Department and is responsible for the overall administration and maintenance of the state parks. To aid the Commissioner in his duties the Governor may establish an Advisory Committee that will act in a consultant capacity to the Director on matters pertaining to the parks. Under the Commissioner there are the offices of the Assistant Commissioner of Parks, museum custodians, state park supervisors, state park superintendents, park rangers and foremen.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Tilden, State Parks, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁹Department of Conservation and Economic Development, "Organization," p. 1.

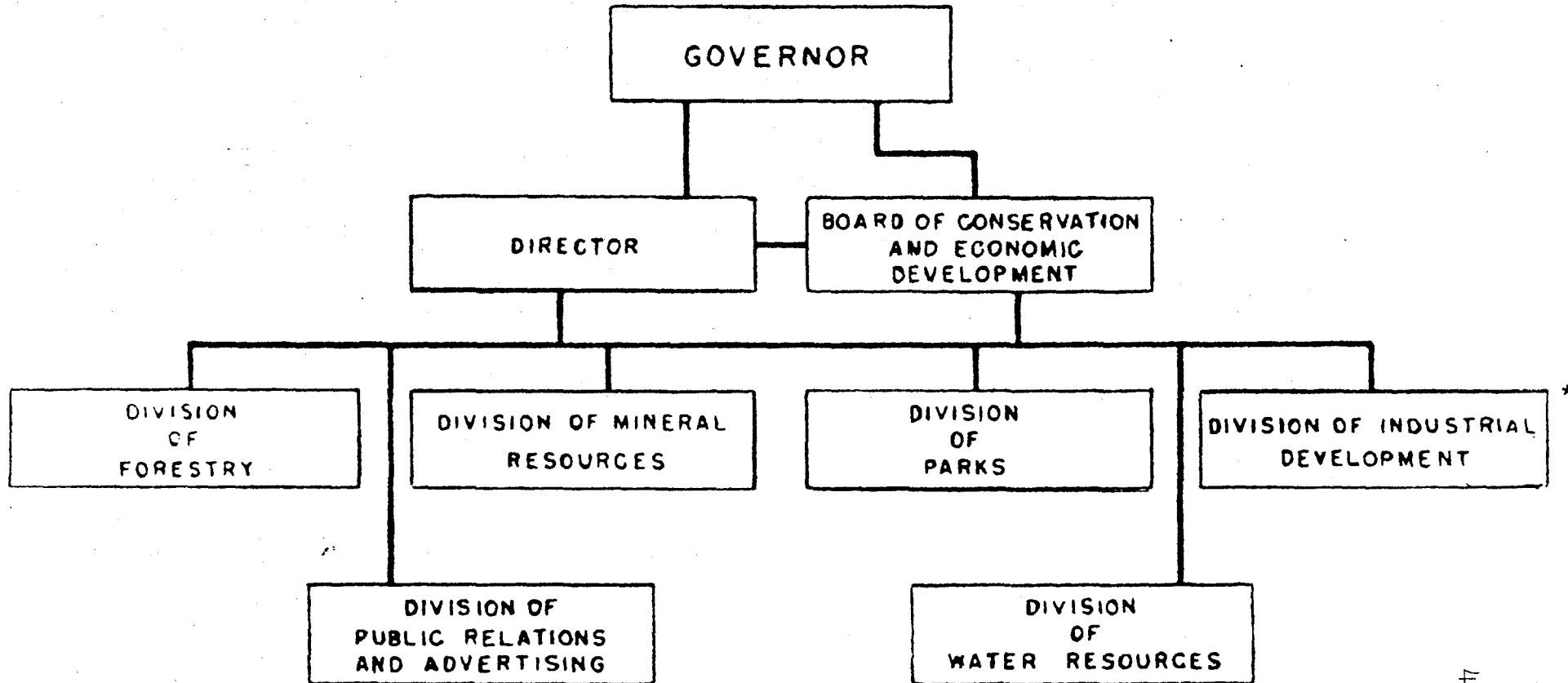
⁷⁰Virginia Code Commission, Code of Virginia (12 volumes, Charlottesville: Virginia Code Commission, 1964), III, p. 39.

The general powers of the state parks division, acting with the approval of the Director and Board of the Commission, include:

1. To acquire, construct, enlarge, improve, operate, and maintain camping and recreational facilities in any of the State parks under the control of the Department;
2. To issue revenue bonds [Virginia's principal means of financing the operation of its state parks] of the State payable solely from the earnings of camping and recreational facilities;
3. To fix and collect fees and charges for the use of camping and recreational facilities;
4. To receive and accept from any agency . . . contributions of either money or property or other things of value, to be held, used and applied for the purposes of this chapter;
5. To make and enter into all contracts or agreements necessary to the execution of the powers of this chapter and to employ engineering, architectural and construction experts, brokers and such other employees as he [the Director] may deem necessary.⁷¹

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 71-72.

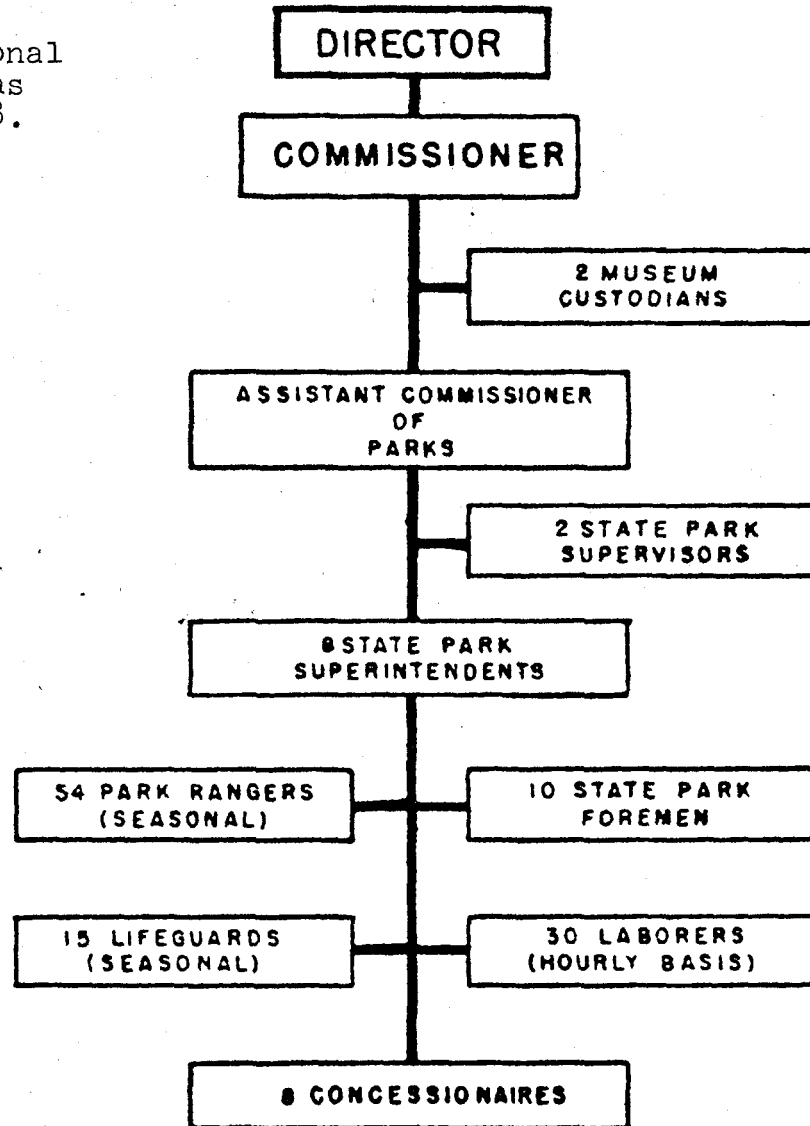
VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

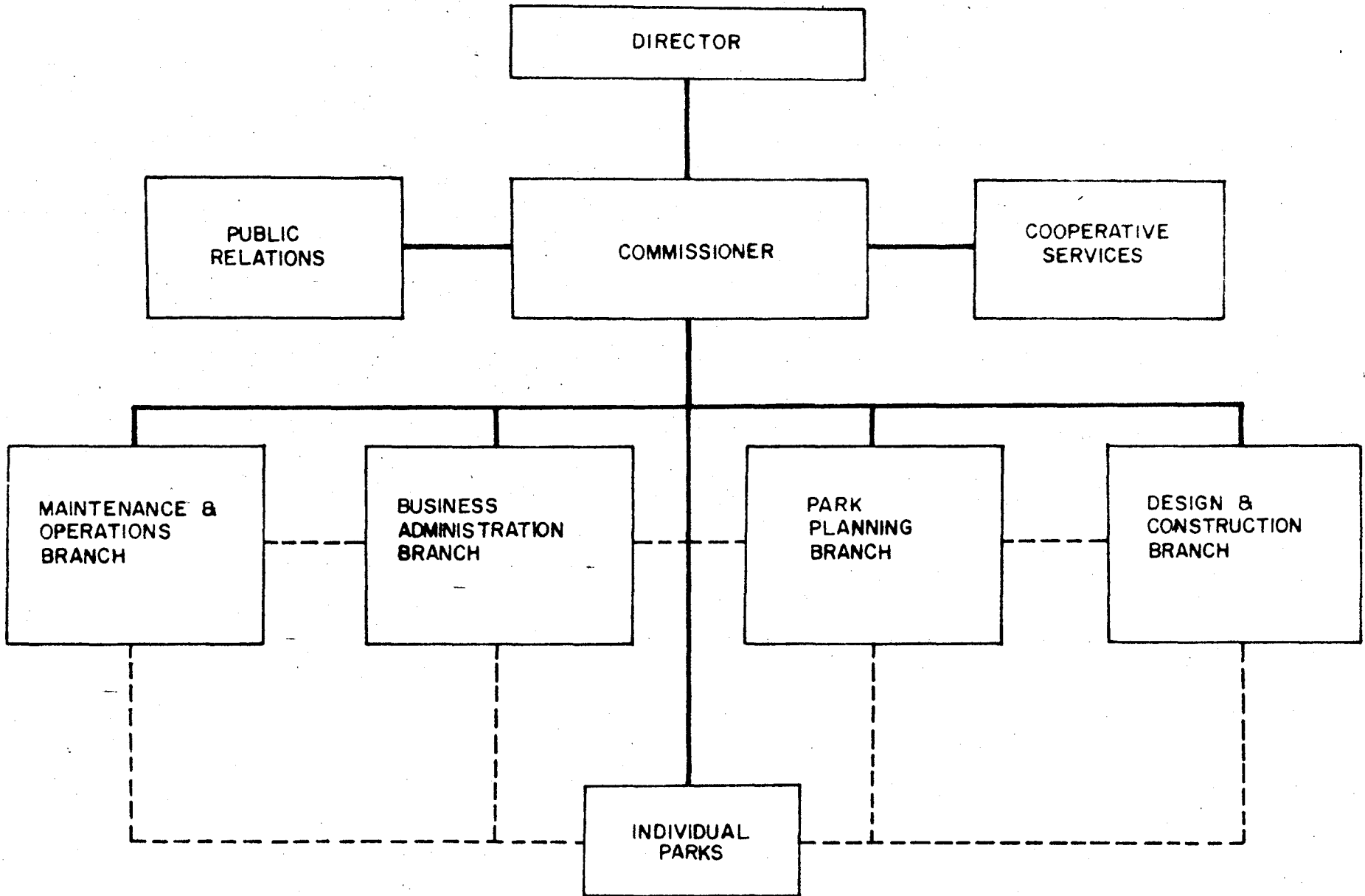


*Effective July 1, 1962, the Division of Industrial Development became a separate department.

DIVISION OF PARKS

*The structural and organizational development of the Division has been vastly revised since 1958. See chart on next page.





CHAPTER III

SAYLER'S CREEK BATTLEFIELD PARK

In their programs the state parks play an important role in the preservation of the historical places that mark the progression of a state's growth and story.¹ Virginia's Division of State Parks recognizes and supports this objective. "The mission of the Division of Parks is to perpetuate the historic property and values and to encourage and facilitate meaningful visitor experience."² However thirty-five years ago the citizens of Rice, Virginia, might have found the above statement a bit meaningless. The Sayler's Creek area had not been set aside in commemoration of the historic battle that occurred there during the Civil War.

I. Movement to Create the Park

The movement to have the area of Sayler's Creek brought into the state parks system was inaugurated on Memorial Day, 1934. This gathering was purely local, being sponsored by a leader in the area's civic affairs, Mrs. C. W. Phelps. The meeting, which was held at the junction of Amelia, Nottoway,

¹Tilden, State Parks, p. 27.

²National Park Service, Master Plan for Sayler's Creek Battlefield Park (3 volumes, Richmond: Department of the Interior, 1962), I, p. 5.

and Prince Edward Counties, resulted in the creation of the Sayler's Creek Battlefield Park Association.³ Committees were established in each of the three counties, and in the light of federal aid granted in 1933 to the parks of the state, the Association felt that by petitioning through letters to their Congressmen the battlefield would be duly recognized.⁴

In 1934 Robert K. Brock, a State Senator from Prince Edward County, introduced a resolution to create a park at Sayler's Creek and to appropriate \$1,500 to assist in obtaining the property.⁵ Impressed by the work of the Battlefield Park Association, the General Assembly passed, in 1936, this resolution to purchase some ground on which the battle took place. This was reportedly the first time that the legislature had set aside money for this purpose.⁶

With the money, the Hillsman House and ten acres surrounding the structure was soon acquired. The purchase of the land was made by Wilbur C. Hall, then head of the Virginia Conservation Commission, who bought the land from James M. Hillsman, a

³Virginia Department of Conservation and Economic Development, Sayler's Creek Battlefield Park (Richmond: Virginia Department of Conservation and Economic Development, 1963), p. 6.

⁴Ibid., p. 6.

⁵United States Congress, Congressional Records, 87th Congress, 2nd Session, August 20 - August 30, 1962 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1962), p. 6443.

⁶Robert K. Brock, "Last Battlefield Park," The Commonwealth, VI (April, 1939), p. 9.

descendant of the family who owned the land in 1865.⁷

After the acquisition of the Hillsman House land, the counties of Amelia, Nottoway, and Prince Edward donated five hundred dollars each to repair the House. The firm of Claiborne and Taylor, of Richmond, completed the work in 1937.⁸

Further development of the battlefield park was undertaken in 1940 when the General Assembly appropriated twenty-five thousand dollars for the purchase of additional property and for repairs to be made on the Hillsman House.⁹ A survey was undertaken by the Conservation Commission in 1941 to ascertain the possibilities of developing a portion of the proposed battlefield area. However this study did not take into consideration the property boundaries of the individual owners within the tract. Furthermore the owners at that time had no desire to sell their property to the Division of Parks.¹⁰

Because World War II caused a de-emphasis in conservation and park development it was not until 1944 that the Conservation Commission purchased two hundred acres of land which enveloped

⁷Virginia Department of Conservation, Sayler's Creek, p. 6; Personal interview with Byrdie M. Hillsman, May 20, 1967.

⁸Brock, "Last Battlefield Park," p. 9.

⁹Sayler's Creek Correspondence, 1962-1964, (MS in Division of State Parks, Richmond, Virginia). Ben H. Bolen to A. Plunket Beirne, February 12, 1962.

¹⁰Sayler's Creek Correspondence, 1943-1946, (MS in Division of State Parks, Richmond Virginia). Randolph Odell to William A Wright, May 21, 1943.

the Sayler's Creek area for the sum of fourteen thousand dollars.¹¹
 In addition to the money given to former owners George Frank, H. L. Schmidt, B. L. Garnett, Claude Farley, S. M. McNutt, and J. C. Vaughan, the State afforded these people the right to live on and farm the land tax free for a period of five years after the purchase date.¹²

The acreage for the park increased when a year later private donations accounted for ten additional acres--one gift of eight acres was given by Albert Hillsman and two acres by Henry Strause. The Division of Parks now owned 220 acres of the battlefield land.¹³

Development of the grounds around the Hillsman House proved to be a difficult task because of a lack of funds. Randolph Odell commented, "While it would be well to landscape the whole area, . . . it is very questionable if we have enough funds available to do all of this and restore the Hillsman House."¹⁴ It was, therefore, decided to landscape only the area near and around the house and to restore the building.¹⁵

¹¹Sayler's Creek Correspondence, 1962-1964. Ben H. Bolen to A. Plunket Beirne, February 12, 1962.

¹²Sayler's Creek Correspondence, 1943-1946. Randolph Odell to George Dean, January 8, 1945.

¹³Virginia Department of Conservation, Sayler's Creek, p. 6.

¹⁴Sayler's Creek Correspondence, 1947-1952, (MS in Division of State Parks, Richmond, Virginia). Randolph Odell to William A. Wright, February 13, 1947.

¹⁵Ibid.

To determine what had to be restored at the Hillsman House the Division of Parks, in the fall of 1947, hired the services of Erling H. Pederson, an architect from Philadelphia.¹⁶ After finding that practically the entire interior and exterior of the house had to be remodelled and that the electrical and water systems were in need of repair, the Division awarded a contract for the renovations to the Motley Construction Company of Farmville, Virginia.¹⁷

For the electrical repairs the Farmville Electric Company was given the contract with the State.¹⁸ The necessary landscape work for the immediate area was undertaken by the Southside Nurseries.¹⁹

The Director of Parks, Randolph Odell, and the Chairman of the Conservation Commission, William Wright, visited the battlefield park in the spring of 1948 and found that the restoration work was well under way.²⁰

These officials expressed hope that the work would be finished by the start of the summer, so that the park could be officially dedicated. In May of 1948 the Division of History

¹⁶Sayler's Creek Correspondence, 1947-1952. Randolph Odell to Erling H. Pederson, November 12, 1947.

¹⁷Ibid., Odell to Pederson, November 28, 1947.

¹⁸Sayler's Creek Correspondence, 1947-1952. Randolph Odell to F. L. Yates, March 27, 1948.

¹⁹Ibid., Odell to Yates, June 21, 1948.

²⁰Ibid., Odell to Yates, April 24, 1948.

and Archeology placed a historical marker at the Hillsman House.²¹

The restoration work was completed in the middle of June. After inspecting the labor of the contractors and finding it to their liking, the Division of Parks set June 30, 1948, as the dedication date for Sayler's Creek Battlefield Park.²² Witnessed by six hundred people appropriate exercises then took place recognizing this site as a historic landmark of the Civil War and as the newest member of Virginia's state parks.²³

II. The Park in the Fifties

The organization and operation of the historical park was relatively simple and on a small scale. A contract was drawn up between the Department of Conservation and Development and Fitzhugh Lee Yates, resident farmer and attendant for the park.²⁴ The Department agreed to continue leasing tracts of land within the Sayler's Creek boundaries for a period of five years. In addition the Department was to keep all the buildings on the premises in good repair and would also maintain all existing fences. In return, Mr. Yates agreed to maintain the Hillsman

²¹Ibid., Odell to Yates, May 27, 1948.

²²Sayler's Creek Correspondence, 1947-1952. Wilson Harris to Erling H. Pederson, June 9, 1948.

²³Virginia Department of Conservation, Sayler's Creek, p. 6.

²⁴Sayler's Creek Correspondence, 1947-1952. Contract between the Department of Conservation and Development and F. L. Yates, December 10, 1949.

House and the surrounding landscape. Furthermore Yates was to serve as a guide for accomodation of daily visitors to the House.²⁵ As a result of this agreement no funds had to be appropriated for the maintenance of the park, because revenue from the operation of the farm covered expenses.²⁶

The park was opened to the tourists on a yearly program from April to October. Annual attendance figures for the fifties ranged from a few thousand to a high of thirteen thousand visitors recorded in 1959.²⁷

III. Improvements Made on the Park

Despite a growing yearly attendance record, the need for improvements in the park became evident. As in the past it was local interest which initiated the Sayler's Creek park movement, and it was this same local spirit that began to demand more facilities at the park.

The people of Rice, Virginia, began, in 1952, to write the Division of Parks inquiring into the possibilities of improving on the conditions existant at Sayler's Creek. One particular

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Department of Conservation and Economic Development, Origin and Development, p. 2.

²⁷Sayler's Creek Correspondence, 1962-1964. Ben H. Bolen to W. Cabell Fitzpatrick, February 19, 1962. These totals were arrived at through the State Highway traffic counts that were calculated for Route 307, leading to the park and secondly from the sheets kept by Byrdie Mae Hillsman during the tourist season.

citizen, a Mr. C. E. Hodnett, seemed to describe the situation perfectly by stating, "I will speak for this community. We wish to call your attention to Sailor's [sic] Creek Battlefield Park. . . . A lot of people come here to see the Park and all there is [is] just the old Hillsman House and a marker."²⁸ He continued further by saying in effect that the park area was rampant with vegetation and that the park is hardly distinguishable from the surrounding countryside. Yet the Division of Parks was handicapped, because the General Assembly had previously allotted funds for the purpose of acquiring land and restoring the house--nothing beyond that.²⁹

This condition remained at Sayler's Creek until the spring of 1961. It was decided then to make an extensive study of the park in order to assess the type and amount of maintenance and development that the area justified. The National Park Service then was called in to aid in the study.³⁰ By March of 1962 the study was concluded. The salient features of the inventory were to first initiate a more intensive study into the battle. Secondly after the completion of the historical research, a development plan for greater appreciation of the

²⁸Sayler's Creek Correspondence, 1947-1952. C. E. Hodnett to John Johnson, April 10, 1952.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Department of Conservation and Economic Development, "Development of Sayler's Creek Battlefield Park" (Richmond: Department of Conservation and Economic Development, 1962), p. 1.

historic site was created.³¹

Following through on the suggestions made by the study group the Department of Conservation installed additional facilities emphasizing the interpretive method, which is basically a self-guiding procedure that seeks to enhance the experience of the visitors.³² Constructive outdoor maps and visual charts of the battle, both interpretive tools, were soon erected. Also directional markers that clarified the touring route were installed.³³

To add more color and touch of authenticity to the park two 1,200 pound Civil War cannons were transferred from the Manassas Battlefield Park to Sayler's Creek.³⁴ The Highway Department of Virginia also aided in the program of improvements by enlarging the parking lot at the Hillsman House and by constructing wider road shoulders, so that tourists could stop and view the scenery.³⁵ Finally another park employee was added to coordinate the historical research program, the display in the Hillsman House, and the interpretive method. This person held the position of ranger-historian and was

³¹Ibid., p. 1.

³²National Park Service, Master Plan, I, p. 8.

³³Ibid., p. 10.

³⁴Sayler's Creek Correspondence, 1962-1964. M. M. Sutherland to James J. Geary, March 12, 1962.

³⁵Department of Conservation and Economic Development, "Development of Sayler's Creek," p. 1.

employed for the summer months, when visitors were more numerous. With the addition of a ranger-historian tourists were more adequately provided for when they visited the park.³⁶

The renovations were completed by late May, 1962. A dedication committee was established: (1) to celebrate the re-awakening of interest in the park; (2) to dedicate the new facilities; and (3) to commemorate the war dead of ninety-seven years ago.³⁷ Through the efforts of Ben H. Bolen, the Commissioner, and Cabell Fitzpatrick, a dedication ceremony took place on August 19, 1962. Some two thousand people witnessed the event, and such state dignitaries as Congressman Watkins M. Abbitt, William M. Tuck, former Governor of Virginia, and State Senator Charles T. Moses made speeches.³⁸ In particular, Moses called the park "the long neglected historic site."³⁹ Moses, Chairman of the Virginia Civil War Commission, presented a cannon to the park. Commissioner Bolen accepted the cannon and promised that the Commonwealth intended to continue improving the facilities at the park.⁴⁰

³⁶National Park Service, Master Plan, I, p. 6.

³⁷Sayler's Creek Correspondence, 1962-1964. Valentine W. Southall to Mills E. Godwin, Jr., June 15, 1962.

³⁸Farmville Herald, Farmville, Virginia, August 21, 1962.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

IV. Conclusion

The essential and only resource of this park is the ground on which the Confederate and Union forces engaged in the last major battle of the Civil War. Because of this lone feature, however, one can derive significant value from a visit to the park. A first-hand examination of the battle site can transmit a sense of personal identification with the past events. The tourist might also increase his knowledge of the tactics, fighting methods, and hardships faced by those who fought there. The park provides value in that the visitor is thus acquainted with a greater understanding of the battle's place in the overall picture of the war.⁴¹ Aside from these benefits is the fact that the historic site of Appomattox is more emphasized and treasured by the presence of Sayler's Creek--the battle which precipitated the surrender.

Yet even with the re-awakened interest brought about by the centennial years, this battlefield park continues to remain virtually unknown to the public. Perhaps the cause for such obscurity can be directed to education. The ranger-historian expressed his belief that ". . . It's the result of education. People study about Richmond, Petersburg, and Appomattox in their elementary education, but nobody studies about the importance of Sayler's Creek."⁴² In addition to the education factor,

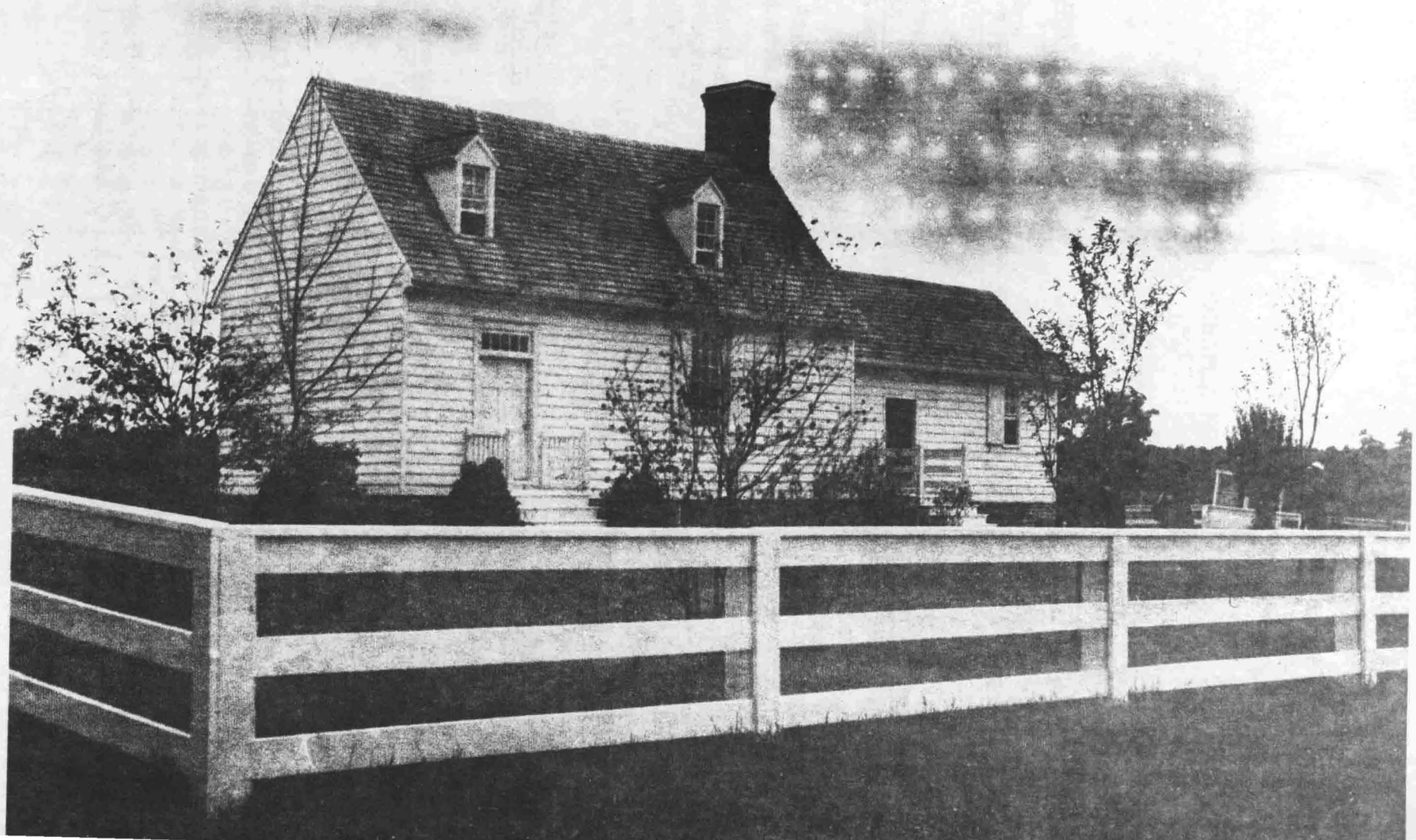
⁴¹National Park Service, Master Plan, I, pp. 3-5.

⁴²Richmond Times Dispatch, Richmond, Virginia, June 25, 1967.

a more practical cause is evident in the poor roads that lead to the battlefield. These mere paths obviously discourage a number of possible tourists.

Park officials are now uncertain about the future of the park. Will increased expenditures to develop result in increased participation by the public?⁴³ At this juncture the answer cannot be ascertained. However although Sayler's Creek has been decidedly forgotten throughout the years, the battlefield is a significant event in the story of the Civil War. By subsequently dedicating it as a park, the area thus reflected further progress in the preservation of the historic and natural sites of the state.

⁴³Personal interview with Ben H. Bolen, February 2, 1967.



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On my honor, as a gentleman,
I pledge this paper as being
my own work.

Peter Warren Eldredge

Peter Warren Eldredge