

Trail Length: 1.89 miles roundtrip
 Surface: Natural dirt (muddy at times)
 Tread Minimum Width: 30 inches
 Slope Maximum: 2%
 Cross Slope Maximum: 5%

North



STUDLEY RD

Shelton House

Corn Crib

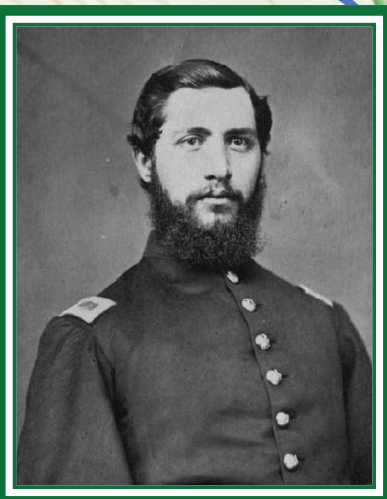
Shelton Family Cemetery

U.S. Earthworks

U.S. Earthworks

Totopotomoy Creek

Confederate Earthworks



The best first hand account of the battle is found in the journal of U.S. Army 1st Lt. Robert Robertson, aide-de-camp to Brig. General Nelson Miles.

ALLEN COUNTY-FORT WAYNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The interpretive trail ends at the park boundary on the north side of the bridge.

Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield Interpretive Trail

Trace the story of the Civil War battle that took place here in 1864. Numbered stakes mark the stops along the trail. Help preserve the battlefield by staying on the trail.

1 The Shelton House

When United States troops arrived at Rural Plains on May 29, 1864, they found Sarah Shelton, her adult daughters, teenage son, and at least one grandchild at home. The Shelton House had been little touched by the war: there were crops in the fields, cows in the pasture, and a garden with ripe strawberries.

2 The Basement

Where would you take shelter during an emergency? The Sheltons and at least one enslaved woman retreated to the basement dining room as armies converged on the home. They endured bombardment, feeling the house above them shake from the impact of artillery shells. Federal officers made efforts to ensure their safety, extinguishing fires whenever the house was set ablaze.

3 Lives on the Line

Before the war, 18 men, 19 women, and 9 young children were enslaved at Rural Plains. Births, deaths, marriages, family celebrations, and grieving occurred here. With the end of the war came freedom and difficult decisions: go and find work elsewhere or stay and work for wages in a familiar place.

4 Digging In Under Fire

Thirty-six cannons lined these trenches, stretching back towards the house. Over three days the 1st New York Light Artillery, Battery B, fired over 250 rounds. The noise was deafening. Captain Nelson Ames, commanding the battery, wrote of warning the Shelton family to leave for their safety. Sarah Shelton flatly refused.

5 Shelton Family Cemetery

During the battle, shot and shell flew over the cemetery. Remains from this cemetery were moved to Richmond cemeteries in 1952. Nearby is an unmarked cemetery for enslaved people.

6 A Historic Landscape

At the time of the battle, the area around you was entirely open, with fields of wheat and corn as well as apple and peach orchards. The only wooded areas were in the creek bottom. Federal troops had to advance across open ground, exposed to Confederate rifle and artillery fire. With no natural protection, they dug trenches for cover.

7 Pushing Forward

Down the hill in front of you United States troops charged on May 30 and May 31, 1864. Both times men from New York, Pennsylvania, and Michigan made it across Totopotomoy Creek. U. S. Private George Nichols wrote, "Heavy battle from 8 A.M. to 2 P.M.; first line of Rebel entrenchments carried by a charge half past 8, second one carried at 10 A.M." Despite this success, the troops could not advance farther and pulled back.

8 Into the Creek

United States troops splashed across Totopotomoy Creek twice in two days. Witnessing the attack from the other side, Confederate Captain T. C. Morgan wrote, "... out of the thicket they burst 'Double-quick!' and down the hill they swept in a long trot, many many times our numbers ... we again poured a well directed fire into their ranks. Scores fell in their tracks..." Although they had temporarily captured the Confederate defenses, Federal commanders pulled them back.

9 The Aftermath

After three days of inconclusive fighting the U. S. Army withdrew towards Cold Harbor and the family emerged to assess the damage. Young Walter Shelton wrote, "When I looked out I did not know the place. There was a line of fortifications extending through the place all fences gone some of the out houses pulled down. Also two peach orchards, two apple orchards were cut down ... The Federals took all of our corn, wheat and meat."

Totopotomoy Creek and the 1864 Overland Campaign

The stakes were high and both sides were weary as the third year of the war began in 1864. The North experienced political opposition and draft riots. In the South, rampant inflation, food shortages, and expanded conscription (involuntary military service) caused bitterness and anger.

United States forces launched attacks in Georgia, Louisiana, the Gulf Coast, and the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia in a coordinated effort to defeat the Confederacy. With the presidential election looming, pressure was on General Ulysses S. Grant to produce victories.

In Virginia, the United States Army clashed with Confederate forces at Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and North Anna before arriving along Totopotomoy Creek. A grueling month of marching and fighting had left the troops wrecked and exhausted. The United States forces tested Confederate defenses here, but were unable to find an opportunity to break through to Richmond. The fighting at Totopotomoy Creek proved inconclusive. Grant then moved the army south to Cold Harbor.

More information about the Overland Campaign and the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek can be found on our website:

www.nps.gov/rich



In the event of an emergency call 911
 7273 Studley Road
 Mechanicsville, VA 23116

Want to learn more?

Cold Harbor Visitor Center

is your next stop:

5515 Anderson-Wright Dr.
 Mechanicsville, VA 23111



- Battlefield exhibits
- Ranger programs
- Annual events
- Park store