



"They kept up a heavy fire on the house for more than an hour, and it was completely riddled, the women in the basement shivering and almost fainting from terror."
- Lt. Robert Robertson



A House of Fine Brick

This circa 1725 Georgian mansion offers an incredible opportunity to learn about an 18th-century slaveholding plantation that became a Civil War battlefield.

For about 300 years, the Shelton family owned this property. Enslaved people

labored here, students boarded here, and soldiers fought here.

In 2006, Bill Shelton, the last family member to live at Rural Plains passed away. Per his wishes, the remaining 124-acre property became part of the National Park Service.

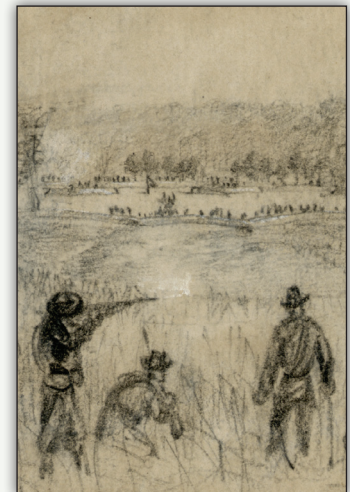
War on the Doorstep

On May 28, 1864, war came to Rural Plains. United States Army officers made the house and grounds a headquarters, cannons took up position in the yard, and signalmen waved their flags from the roof. The family took shelter in the basement, while the

enslaved workers sought refuge where they could. Caught across Totopotomoy Creek behind Confederate lines, Edwin Shelton could only watch helplessly as his home became the target of Confederate fire.

Cannon fire struck the house repeatedly. The multiple repairs to the brick of the house are testimony to the intensity of the shell damage. The fighting that swirled around the house transformed this homeplace into a battlefield – an identity that endures still.

After three days and approximately 1,000 casualties, the armies vacated their positions, leaving behind a scarred and tattered landscape, damaged buildings, and shaken civilians who had been caught in the crossfire.



Opening shots of the battle of Totopotomoy Creek are captured in this sketch by artist Alfred Waud. This view from the upstairs window of the Shelton House shows U. S. troops in the foreground and the Confederate line in the distance. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Preservation Efforts

When Bill Shelton died in 2006, National Park Service added this land to Richmond National Battlefield Park. In 2013, local citizens created the Rural Plains Foundation to support the preservation of the house and grounds.

Since then, the park has worked diligently with the Rural Plains Foundation to restore the property to its 1864 appearance and preserve it for future generations.

Restoration and archeological efforts began in 2007. Projects included repairing internal and external brickwork, preserving historic furnishings and documents, replacing the metal roof with wood shingles, and removing a 20th-century back porch.

Archeological efforts have focused on identifying outbuildings, quarters for enslaved people, and unmarked graves on the property.

pre-1700s



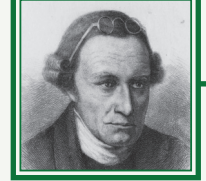
Totopotomoy Creek is within the ancestral homelands of the Pamunkey Indian Tribe, named for paramount chief Totopotomoy who died at the Battle of Bloody Run (1656). SMITHSONIAN

circa 1725



The house is built with brick made on the site that will become known as Rural Plains. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

1754



Sarah "Sallie" Shelton marries Patrick Henry (pictured). The couple resides at nearby Pine Slash farm. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

1837



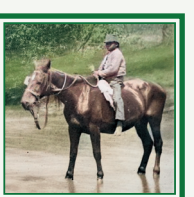
A school for "young ladies" opens. About a dozen students practice a wide range of subjects including grammar, history, math, and needlework. The school is closed by 1850. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

1860



Before the war, Emma Shelton (pictured), four other family members, and 37 enslaved people were living at Rural Plains. The Sheltons were one of the wealthiest landowners in the area. NPS

1862



Two enslaved workers, Frank and Billy, escape when federal troops pass through the area. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

1864



The family shelters in the basement as the house is hit with about 50 shells during the battle of Totopotomoy Creek. These roof structures are evidence of the damage. NPS

1903



The post-war period brings financial hardship. In 1903, William Shelton buys the family home when it is sold at auction to clear his father's debts. NPS

1927



Rural Plains Nursery opens, specializing in boxwoods and holly trees. NPS

2006



Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is added as a new unit at Richmond National Battlefield Park.

Today



Restoration of the house at Rural Plains continues as special events and exhibits educate the public about the history of this unique place. COURTESY OF DON WARD

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



STUDLEY RD

Shelton House

Corn Crib

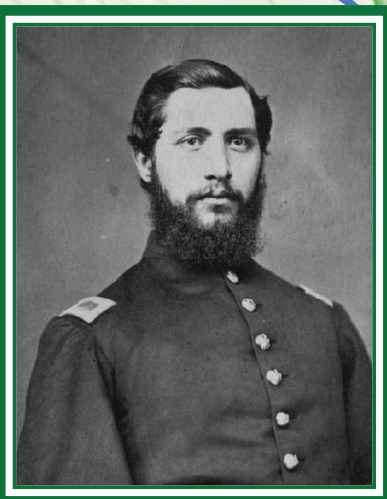
Shelton Family Cemetery

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