COMMON Ground

PRESERVING OUR NATION'S HERITAGE FALL 2005

HAUNTED HISTORY *Slavery and the landscape of myth at america's civil war sites*

FIRST WORD

A Sense of Connection

BY CINDY MACLEOD

PARK INTERPRETERS HAVE A PROUD TRADITION of engaging audiences with stories and conversation about places and events. My goal as a superintendent is to ensure that these places, recognized by Congress as nationally significant, have true meaning and importance for their owners, the American people. Meeting that goal for all is a challenge. To reach a wide audience—and encourage new ones—interpretation must be broad and deep, as well as unimpeachably accurate. **I WAS FORTUNATE TO COME TO** Richmond National Battlefield Park at a time ripe for the infusion of energy and funds. I came as an outsider, an architectural historian who knew more about the houses used as hospitals during the Civil War than about the battles that caused soldiers' injuries. **THE PARK WAS ROOTED IN** the tradition of private tours tracing troop movements, tours led by military historians for veterans and their descendants. Once that generation passed—and when funds were sufficient—the emphasis was on living history highlighting the life of the soldier (an activity now criticized as more entertainment than education). Agency leaders seemed content that Gettysburg told the most powerful Civil War story. Richmond idled along, visited mainly by the most faithful of military history devotees. By 1995, the exhibits were old and abbreviated; it was time for a change. **WE WROTE A PHILOSOPHICAL BLUEPRINT** that aimed neither to glorify nor denigrate. We wanted a moving and eloquent place where visitors could find the war's meaning for themselves. We would not only explain the strategy of the battles, but also how the Confederate capital's industrial, economic, political, and social fabric merged with that of a war zone. Visitors would see both the complexity of the past and the strengths and shortcomings in our collective heritage.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AN ARRAY OF GROUPS, we built a visitor center at the Tredegar Iron Works, a war-era site that invites telling stories about the conflict's industrial requirements, slave and female labor, and transport systems. The location next to Belle Isle, a former prison camp for Union soldiers, and Hollywood Cemetery, a resting place for Confederate officers and unknown soldiers, facilitates storytelling too. We designed the exhibits with an eye to engaging all kinds of visitors, including those new to the battlefield parks. **THE MOST RECENT ADDITION IS A STATUE OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN AND HIS SON,** who visited Richmond right after its fall in April 1865. That event—one of "the most unforgettable scenes of this unforgettable war," says a prominent historian—was largely forgotten. Pulling that visit from history's dustbin evoked strong opinion, which I consider positive. Since we aim to make these places meaningful, hearing from our visitors is a way to gauge the success of the connection. **SO WE ASK FOR COMMENTS.** Here are a few excerpts:

"Two of my ancestors fought with the Union and one with the Confederacy. I tend to agree with the idea that states should have more power and the federal government less. If only the South had defended other rights than the right to own slaves."

"There are so many other layers that, as one learns about the other side, you come to realize that what you are taught is not always the only way."

"We consider the Civil War as a turning point for our nation and its people. Your center is critical for the youth of today to help them learn the story of Independence and then the story of the Civil War—two powerful stories."

> **"We wrote a philosophical blueprint that aimed neither to glorify nor denigrate. We wanted a moving and eloquent place where visitors could find the war's meaning for themselves."**

"The Civil War was fought over me, an African American woman. More blood was shed over the lives of black Americans than in any other war. I am a proud American. I pray that our wounds will *finally* heal."

"Long live the South."

"It is with deep sorrow that I view these scenes about the Civil War . . . a period of great tragedy, massive loss of life, cruelty of all sorts. I do so wish we could all feel some degree of peace at last. We have so much in the present day to solve."

WOW, I SAY WHEN I READ THESE NOTES. People really want to talk to us about their visit. That's success. During my tenure, my own interests have given way to a broader understanding of the connectedness of the American experience. I am still learning and I wish the same for all my countrymen.

Cindy MacLeod is Superintendent of Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site.

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS

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Above: Sculpture at the Old South Meeting House, part of Boston National Historical Park's collaboration with the Institute of Contemporary Arts.

Cover: Fort Sumter.
DAVID ANDREWS/NPS

NEWS CLOSEUP

NEW VOICE IN HALLOWED PLACES

Contemporary Art Taps Vitality of Boston's Historic Sites

Visitors to history-rich Boston have noticed a change in the red brick and cobblestone milieu of the republic's tumultuous early days. Enigmatic shapes at the Paul Revere house. Playful objects on Boston Common. Sculpture in Charlestown Navy Yard. They are part of an ongoing project that's using art to bring a living interpretation to the city's landmarks.

A joint initiative between Boston National Historical Park and the Institute of Contemporary Art invites New England artists to introduce their vision to the city's historic fabric. Using sculpture and interactive displays, the artists have responded to the eternal ideas behind the revolution.

The city witnessed some of the most stirring and remarkable events in the American struggle for independence. Clever and provocative, the temporary exhibits remind visitors of the ideals that moved New Englanders to extreme acts over 200 years ago, ideals that are just as powerful today.

"THIS WAS THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY MOMENT I'VE EVER SEEN IN PUBLIC ART." —MARTY BLATT, CHIEF OF CULTURAL RESOURCES, BOSTON NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

GIVEN THE CITY'S HISTORY, IT SEEMS FITTING THAT THE FIRST PROJECT'S SETTING WAS A PLACE ENSHRINED AS A SYMBOL OF resistance to oppression. Artist Krzysztof Wodiczko interviewed the mothers of murder victims in Charlestown, which at the time had a high rate of unsolved homicides. The neighborhood's code of silence had practically ensured no one would be held accountable.

By night, Wodiczko projected a film of the interviews on Bunker Hill Monument. While art critics from the *Boston Globe* and the *New York Times* raved, some in Charlestown, a tough place with a fierce sense of pride, were not pleased. But according to Marty Blatt, chief of cultural resources at Boston National Historical Park, Wodiczko's message was, "Let the monument speak."

Says Blatt, "What could be more symbolic of freedom than these women who have lost their loved ones? It was the ultimate denial of freedom to have no one come forward. This was the most extraordinary moment I've ever seen in public art."

More projects followed, and the venues expanded to some of the city's private and locally managed historic sites. Inspired to explore how famous places became synonymous with high ideals, artists Laura Baring-Gould and Michael Dowling created *Conspire,* an exhibit with components at the African Meeting House, the Old South Meeting House, the Paul Revere House, and Copp's Hill Burying Ground.

The artists wanted to commemorate these places as sanctuaries, as sites of assembly, dissent, worship, debate, and remembrance. For each site they created house-shaped sculptures, or "vessels," of copper, silver, slate, and alabaster. Each vessel reflected the architecture of its associated structure, with details to evoke the place's history.

Abolitionist writings were etched on the vessel at the African Meeting House. Among the pews of the Old South Meeting House—which hosted gatherings that led to the Boston Tea Party—sat a luminous object surrounded by tea-colored water, at the bottom of which was a scattering of pamphlets on freedom (see page 3).

The house of patriot and craftsman Paul Revere was the setting of a sculptural meditation on colonial style and architectural ornamentation by ICA artist-in-residence Niho Kozuru. Displayed in the courtyard, her cast forms of brightly colored translucent rubber gave viewers a fresh perspective on the colonial aesthetic. Staid urns, finials, spirals, and pendants suddenly took on a feel of fantasy and exuberance.

The collaboration with Boston National Historical Park grew out of the ICA's Vita Brevis program, which commissions artists to create temporary works of art to interpret Boston's landscape and history. Exhibits have appeared in the Frederick Law Olmsted-designed Emerald Necklace—a series of urban parks—

Right: Artist Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Bunker Hill Monument Projection,* a meditation on the first amendment via the testimony of the mothers of murder victims.

ALL PHOTOS INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS

Above: Artist Christopher Frost's *Pumphouse* on display at the Charlestown Navy Yard, a tribute to the men and women who worked there. Their contributions were often overshadowed by the massive vessels they produced. Far right: Exterior view of the pumphouse.

and other public spaces. The arrangement with NPS evolved into a regular artist-in-residence program. "It's a wonderful relationship," says Carole Anne Meehan, the director of Vita Brevis. "It's great territory for artists to dig into."

In the latest exhibit, artist Jerry Beck brings his interpretation to Charlestown Navy Yard. Home to the U.S.S. *Constitution*, the park testifies to the early projection of American power as a young nation struggled to preserve its security and independence. Beck's work, *The Secret Ark of Icon Park*, addresses the post-September 11 climate of fear, the current war, and violence in American popular culture.

Beck's 64-foot-long boat-like structure calls to mind Noah's biblical voyage, suggesting safe harbor in a hostile world. While some of the elements speak of imminent danger, the exhibit also hints at the need for optimism, borrowing imagery from American carnivals and arcades and incorporating the ideas of inspirational figures. Beck ran a series of workshops with local schools in which the students created lifeboat-like forms made of rope, filling them with items related to their families and hopes for the future. This work became part of *The Secret Ark*.

The exhibit is made from industrial, military, and maritime materials, some borrowed from the Navy Yard. It will be on display until October.

The term Vita Brevis is from the Latin expression, *Ars longa, vita brevis,* or "Art is long, life is short." Says Meehan, "It refers to both the temporary nature of the projects and also how the meaning of art outlives us. Something that's on view for a few days can have a long life in people's memories."

From the park perspective, ICA artists have helped define the enduring value of Boston's historic sites, and the dynamism enriches the visitor experience. For this reason, contemporary art has a future at Boston National Historical Park. Says Blatt, "It's important that we have an ongoing relationship with the objects, monuments, and historic landscapes under our stewardship rather than maintain them in a spirit of antiquarianism."

For more information, contact Martin Blatt, Chief of Cultural Resources, Boston National Historical Park, Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston, MA 02129, (617) 242-5648, marty_blatt@nps.gov, or go to www.nps.gov/bost. For more about the Institute of Contemporary Arts' Vita Brevis/Artist-in-Residence Program, call (617) 266-5152 or go to www.icaboston.org.

Right: Niho Kozuru's renderings of colonial architectural elements.

INSIDE THE ROCK

WEB EXHIBIT GOES BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE ICONIC PRISON

Because of its legendary history, Alcatraz is one of the most-visited places in the National Park System. The former federal penitentiary is famous for its high-profile alumni and dramatic setting in the middle of San Francisco Bay, a feature that earned it the name, "the Rock." But there is more to the island's story than the prison that operated there from 1934 to 1963.

Now—thanks to a new online exhibit developed by the Museum Management Program of the National Park Service and Golden Gate National Recreation Area—visitors get a virtual tour of the island's many incarnations, illustrated with objects, documents, and photographs drawn from the park's voluminous collections. It's an intimate and instructive look at a place synonymous with notoriety and exile.

Little is known about the early story of Alcatraz; the history of the area's indigenous peoples was unwritten, passed down in stories from generation to generation. The local Ohlone Indians could have fished and gathered eggs there and—according to legend—it may have been a sacred place. Though there are stories of the island as an area of banishment, some scholars consider them anecdotal.

ALCATRAZ WAS AN EXPERIMENT, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO POST-PROHIBITION, POST-DEPRESSION AMERICA . . . THE NATION WAS APPALLED AT EACH NEW OUTRAGE BY THE LIKES OF AL CAPONE, MACHINE GUN KELLY, AND ALVIN "CREEPY" KARPIS, ALL OF WHOM SERVED TIME HERE.

THE GOLD RUSH OF 1849 TRANSFORMED SAN FRANCISCO FROM A TRANQUIL SETTLEMENT OF 300 INTO A RAPIDLY GROWING city—and a prime target for hostile navies. In 1859, the military built a fort on Alcatraz, one of the most formidable defensive installations west of the Mississippi. By the outbreak of the Civil War, the fortress was bristling with cannon and thickly fortified, and on the watch for Confederates too.

They never arrived, but the Army imprisoned deserters, insubordinate soldiers, and southern sympathizers. The crew of a captured rebel privateer was among the first inmates.

The early 1900s heralded the age of the great battleships, whose powerful, accurate guns rendered the fort's defenses obsolete. Alcatraz became a full-time military prison in 1907.

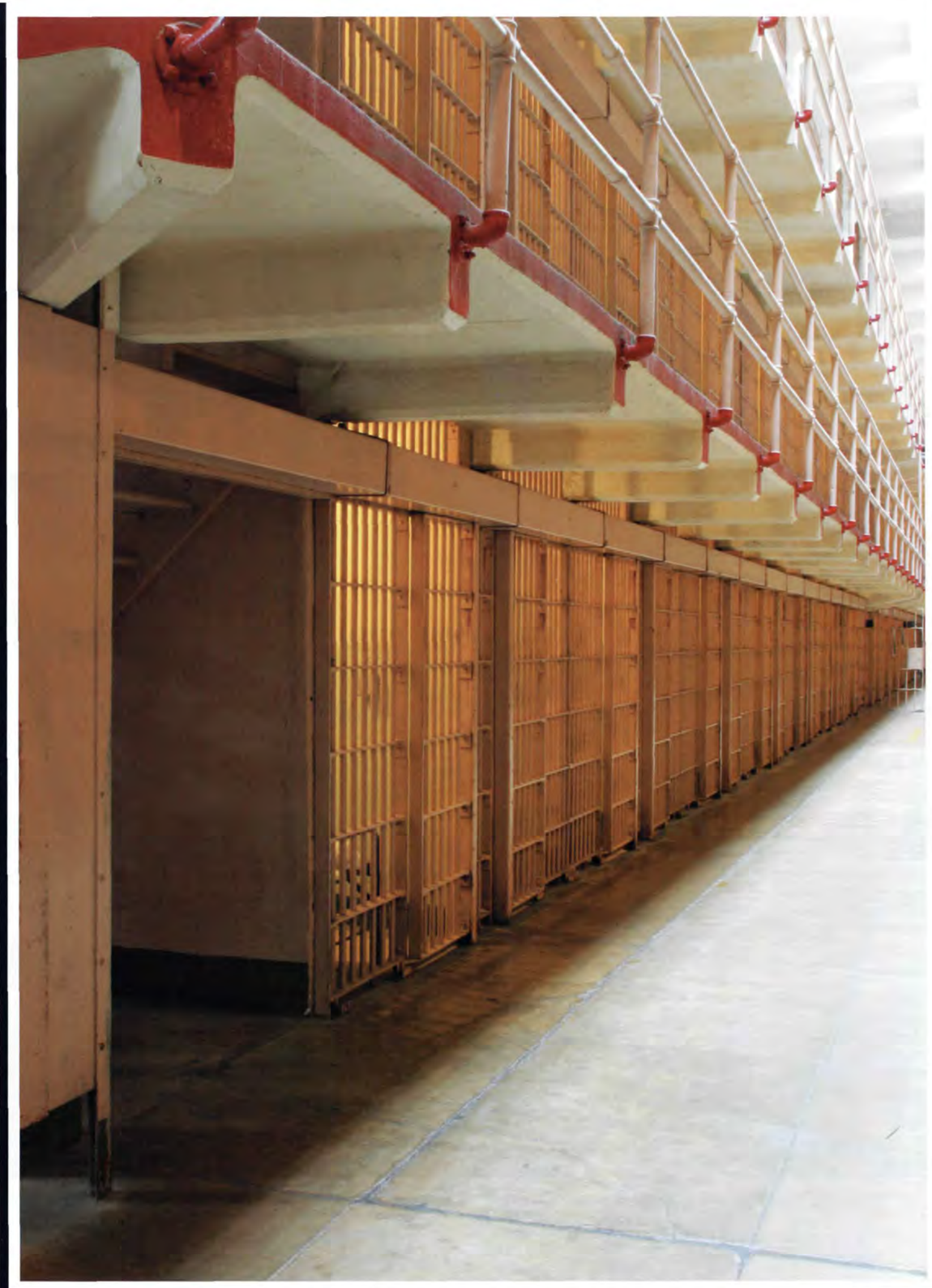
In the exhibit, artifacts such as cartridge belts and binoculars are complemented by period photographs. Giant cannons leveled at the horizon, with prisoners breaking rocks, portray a grim isolation. Historic documents provide a touch of the personal, such as the record of one Charles Glover, imprisoned in 1904 for embezzlement and neglect of duty.

BY 1934, ALCATRAZ HAD BECOME too costly for the Army to operate, so it turned the place over to the Bureau of Prisons, which modernized it into a maximum-security prison for high-risk criminals. Although authorities had considered an isolated site in Alaska, in the end Alcatraz was the final choice for the new prison.

Alcatraz was an experiment, the federal government's response to post-Prohibition, post-Depression America. It was

Above: The hardware of a hard business, artifacts from life at Alcatraz Prison. Right: Inside the Rock.

ALL PHOTOS KHALED BASSIM/NPS MUSEUM MANAGEMENT PROGRAM/GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA EXCEPT AS NOTED



HISTORIC PHOTOS GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Far left: **A former prisoner.**
Near left: **Al Capone.**

Above: **An inmate's personal space. Until Alcatraz, segregating the most troublesome had never been tried on a such a large scale.**

the first time troublesome inmates were isolated from the rest of the prison population on a large scale. The nation was appalled at each new outrage by the likes of Al Capone, Machine Gun Kelly, and Alvin "Creepy" Karpis, all of whom served time here. Their stays helped perpetuate the myth that the place was reserved for A-list offenders. In fact, they had plenty of less illustrious company. And Alcatraz was not packed beyond capacity, as is often the case with modern prisons. At its peak, it held 302 inmates.

THE INSTITUTION'S 29 YEARS AS A FEDERAL PEN MAKE UP THE HEART OF THE EXHIBIT, WHICH HAS sections on the prisoners, the correctional officers and their families, and the paraphernalia of incarceration. Visitors get the full experience of the site's gloomy legend—with locks, handcuffs, weapons, mug shots, and billy clubs all viewable close-up.

The exhibit also explores the everyday business of Alcatraz, and how inmates passed their time within its walls. Compared to other federal prisons, Alcatraz was harsh. To minimize contact (and the potential for trouble), prisoners were housed one to a cell. Activities such as work, classes, or recreation were not a right, but privileges earned through good behavior.

A slide show examines the famous escape of 1962, in which Frank Lee Morris and John and Clarence Anglin disappeared without a trace. It's all here—the fake heads that fooled guards into thinking beds were occupied; makeshift tools; and the *Popular Mechanics* magazines the escapees used as a reference to build a raft.

OFFICERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND CLERKS SHARED THE ISOLATION WITH THE INMATES. EMPLOYEES and their families lived in government housing; children commuted to school by boat to San Francisco. Ninety officers staffed the prison, working three eight-hour shifts. There was a social club, a bowling alley, and a soda fountain—as much of the normalcy of mainland life as possible under the circumstances. In the words of one longtime staffer, it was like "a small town with a big jail."

The officer section of the exhibit includes letters, personal effects, uniform insignia, testimonials, and other trappings of their lives. In one photograph, the teenage

COMPARED TO OTHER FEDERAL PRISONS, ALCATRAZ WAS HARSH. TO MINIMIZE CONTACT (AND THE POTENTIAL FOR TROUBLE), PRISONERS WERE HOUSED ONE TO A CELL. ACTIVITIES SUCH AS WORK, CLASSES, OR RECREATION WERE NOT A RIGHT, BUT PRIVILEGES EARNED THROUGH GOOD BEHAVIOR.

A domestic bowl, a sharp contrast to the penitentiary's purpose as a warehouse for the most incorrigible.

Item from a shaving kit.

Dominoes for the plentiful idle hours.

daughter of a staffer poses on a cannon from the island's days as a 19th-century fortress.

Close-up photos of the famous such as Al Capone and Robert Stroud (the "Birdman of Alcatraz") are also part of the exhibit. Items from the daily grind offer a view of Alcatraz as experienced by the inmates. The objects tell the story like no narrative can—from the homespun conveniences to the homemade weapons—complemented by a rich collection of correspondence, records, and administrative paperwork, all of which offer a unique view into the workings of the prison.

Visitors can go inside, as it were, panning around the cellblocks and zooming down the long corridors. The prison's imposing tiers and blocks, preserved today by the National Park Service, still convey a strong sense of the inmate's environment.

CONCENTRATING THE MOST DIFFICULT PRISONERS AT ALCATRAZ MADE IT POSSIBLE TO MAINTAIN a less restrictive environment in other prisons. But by the early 1960s, the place was falling apart and getting more expensive to run. The Bureau of Prisons began shipping inmates off the Rock to other places. Alcatraz closed in 1963, but it wasn't the end of its notoriety.

OFFICERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND CLERKS SHARED THE ISOLATION WITH THE INMATES . . . THERE WAS A SOCIAL CLUB, A BOWLING ALLEY, AND A SODA FOUNTAIN—AS MUCH OF THE NORMALCY OF MAINLAND LIFE AS POSSIBLE UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

In 1969, a group of Native American protesters occupied the island for over a year and a half, symbolically claiming it for all Indian tribes. The move garnered international attention, which the Indians used to advertise the plight of their people. The episode was a catalyst for the burgeoning Indian movement. "Alcatraz encouraged young people to become themselves, as opposed to hiding their Indianness," recalls Joseph Myers, a member of the Blackfoot tribe.

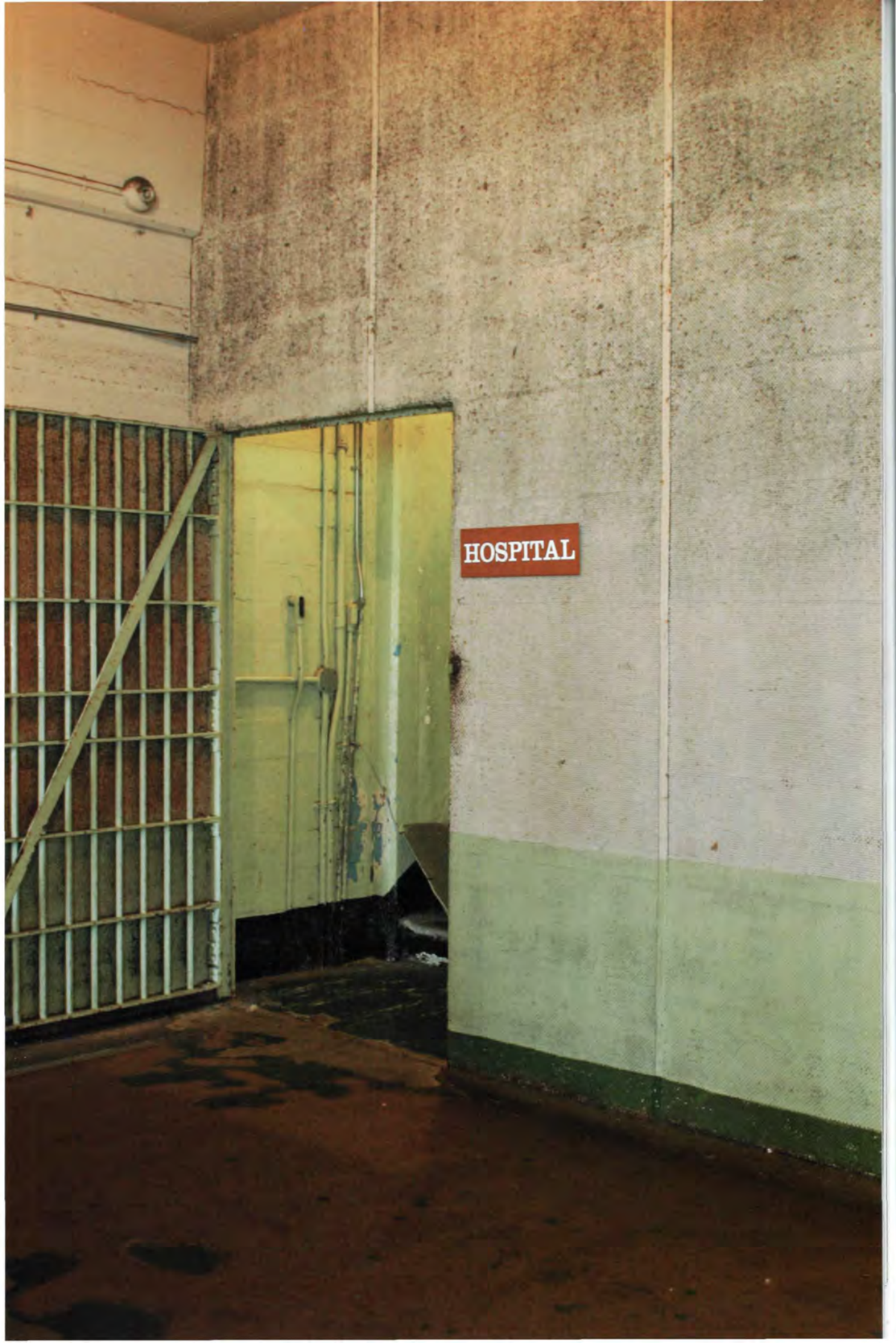
BY 1971, THERE WAS CONFLICT AMONG THE OCCUPIERS AND WANING INTEREST. U.S. MARSHALS forced them to leave and Alcatraz was once again abandoned. The protesters left their mark, however, decorating the prison with political graffiti. The marks remain a strong evocation of the activist spirit of the time. They, too, are part of the online exhibit.

The island became part of the National Park System—a component of Golden Gate National Recreation Area—and the place that had long captivated the public's imagination was no longer forbidden.

While there is no substitute for an actual adventure on the Rock, the inside story is now as close as the nearest computer.

Above: The paraphernalia of incarceration. While guards and their families lived with all the trappings of life on the mainland, the reality of Alcatraz was ever-present. Right: Entrance to the infirmary.

The exhibit is online at www.cr.nps.gov/museum. The park's website, at www.nps.gov/alcatraz, provides a comprehensive history of the island.



ALL PHOTOS DAVID ANDREWS/NPS

Haunted History *Slavery and the landscape of myth at america's civil war sites*

by joe baker *photographs by david andrews*

"I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crises. The great point is to bring them the real facts." *Abraham Lincoln*

On a summer day, maybe the best way to tour the Gettysburg battlefield is on the saddle of a bicycle. If you get up very early, before the town's busy streets and stores fill with their daily measure of some 1.8 million annual visitors, you can peddle along more or less by yourself. This muggy July dawn, just a few days after the annual frenzy of the great battle's anniversary commemoration, I am seated atop a stone wall with my bike leaning next to me. I'm not far from the visitor center and the

Left: **Fort Sumter.**

What really happened is part of our national epic, our Iliad, a long and complicated tale now 142 years old. Like every national epic, it is many stories woven together in a fabric whose warp and weft knots all of us to each other and to our ancestors.

Cyclorama building, very close to the place where, it can be argued, the war's bitter tide turned. At this early hour all I see below me is a fog-shrouded slope, a couple of deer, a jogger; nothing to belie what happened on this spot.

OF COURSE, EVEN THE MOST CASUAL CIVIL WAR BUFF KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED. It was here that a few impossibly brave men from Pickett's division briefly reached the Union lines during the afternoon of July 3, 1863. But that's just a sentence, and what really happened is part of our national epic, our Iliad, a long and complicated tale now 142 years old. Like every national epic, it is many stories woven together in a fabric whose warp and weft knots all of us to each other and to our ancestors.

There are so many questions, so much to think about. What motivated men to acts of suicidal valor and murderous violence? What did the largest land battle in continental history do to a little country town? Why did we throw ourselves against each other in a four-year bloodbath that we have yet to see the like of again, even after two world wars? What should we learn from places like Gettysburg, what sort of story is it? Military history? Morality tale? Sociology lesson? All or none of these things?

Many visitors to Civil War battlefields pose these questions, and the answers are not simple. Because so many of the sites are managed by the National Park Service, it has become the steward of the saga, and holds the weighty responsibility for giving voice to its people, events, ideas, and places. In 1989 and 1990, Congress directed the agency, in reauthorizing legislation for the Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania, and Gettysburg battlefields, to place the battles "in the larger context of the Civil War and American History, including the causes and consequences of the Civil War [for] all the American people." The exhibits and other interpretive media were badly in need of updating to reflect current scholarship. Many displays dated to the 1960s or earlier.

Early memorials to the war were erected by veterans and by people who lived through the conflict. They didn't have to have the war explained to them. They were motivated to honor the sacrifice of their fallen brothers, to do what they could to heal the wounds the war left on the "more perfect Union."

It was during the first 50 years that followed that the myth of a noble "Lost Cause," for which the South fought, took root. It gave white southerners a way to cope with defeat, honoring the sacrifice of the fallen while adapting to the radically changed social and economic order. It also sugarcoated some of the antebellum South's harsh realities. However it came to be, the "Lost Cause" led to a romanticized depiction of Confederate history, reducing the conflicted and complex motivations of southern troops to the defense of a chivalrous way of life redolent of "Gone with the Wind."

Photographs of the first commemorations show Union and Confederate veterans shaking hands next to the monuments. There is sadness in their eyes. They wanted to think that all the horror had been for some honorable purpose. And they did not want this to happen again. Slavery was forgotten as the root of the conflict.

Of course, no modern visitors remember this. Yet they keep coming by the millions, sensing that these places are important, even sacred, but many don't perceive the events clearly. Some of their ancestors came long after the war, or they are themselves immigrants or foreign visitors. While they know the event was a watershed, its lessons can seem uncertain.

Right: Charleston's Liberty Square Visitor Center—departure point for Fort Sumter—four years after inauguration. "We will be back to protest the size of that flag," said a young woman darting in for a quick photo on opening day. The 20-by-36 foot specimen is a replica of the fragile original that flew over the fort, in a display case nearby. "Since the September 11 attacks, no one has complained about the size," writes Superintendent John Tucker in the *George Wright Forum*.

Some African American visitors feel they don't have a stake in this story, despite slavery's central role . . . Most of the war was fought in the South, and some southern visitors can be sensitive, even defensive, about the honor of their ancestors . . . This diverse and sometimes conflicted visitor base presents an enormous challenge.

Above: Interpreter Michael Allen. Right: Visitors to the fort. The bombardment's centennial saw another secession—at the Charleston meeting of a commemorative group established by Congress. When the meeting hotel denied a room to a New Jersey representative, an African American woman, the President moved the event to a nearby naval base. The South Carolina members bolted, "almost as if they had read the stage directions from a script written in 1860-1861," writes Thomas Pressly in *Americans Interpret Their Civil War.*

Some African American visitors don't feel they have a stake in this story, despite slavery's central role in causing the war, and the part their ancestors played on both sides. Most of the war was fought in the South, and some southern visitors can be sensitive, even defensive, about the honor of their ancestors. Many veterans, military historians, and the large community of re-enactors are intensely interested in military minutiae and the day-to-day lives of soldiers. This diverse and sometimes conflicted visitor base presents an enormous challenge. How do you explain these sites to a complicated world that can't remember the war but still feels drawn to it?

In part due to the needs of these visitors, in part due to the Congressional directive, and in part due to a new generation of NPS managers with academic backgrounds, the last decade has seen a revolution in the way the National Park Service tells the story of the war.

New exhibits have been installed at Fort Sumter in South Carolina, at Corinth in Mississippi, at Richmond in Virginia, and a few other sites. New exhibits are planned for a visitor center at Gettysburg slated to open in 2007. These form the vanguard of the attempt to put these places "in the larger context of the Civil War and American history." But as with all revolutions, there has been turmoil.

In 1998 and 2000, NPS-sponsored conferences in Nashville and at Ford's Theater brought park superintendents and scholars together to shape the future of Civil War interpretation. Critics ranging from Pat Buchanan to the Sons of Confederate Veterans expressed concerns that the battlefields were going to lose their importance as hallowed ground.

MOST OF THE DISSENTERS AIMED TO KEEP THE FOCUS ON THE BATTLEFIELDS AND the soldiers who died there. As part of a wide-ranging campaign, the Sons of Confederate Veterans stated that "to attempt to change the way a battlefield is interpreted to include social issues of the day does a great disservice to the soldiers who sacrificed their all." Ultimately, what most of the criticisms seemed to reflect, either obliquely or directly, were concerns that southern veterans would be dishonored by addressing the subject of slavery.

This says much about us as a people. The ugliness of that institution is part of who we are. Historians agree it was the prime cause of the war, yet we remain reluctant to confront it. No doubt, the valor of both armies was the equal of that displayed at Valley Forge and Omaha Beach. Yet the Civil War, now nearly a century and a half behind us, still makes us uneasy.

As I get up to resume my ride, a car pulls up. A young couple emerges, with a German language tour book in hand. They gaze out over the wall, and read the entry in the book, speaking quietly to each other as though they're in church. I know what's on their minds. In this moment, Pickett's doomed men, a lot of them just kids in their late teens and early 20s, lay dead or maimed below them in the same straight ranks in which they advanced, torn to pieces by the rifles and cannon from up here behind the wall. The couple stands and looks on in silence for awhile, and then the young woman sees me and nods, feeling the need to say something.

"We should not forget this."

Having nothing to add, I nod in affirmation, mount the bike, and ease back onto the road.

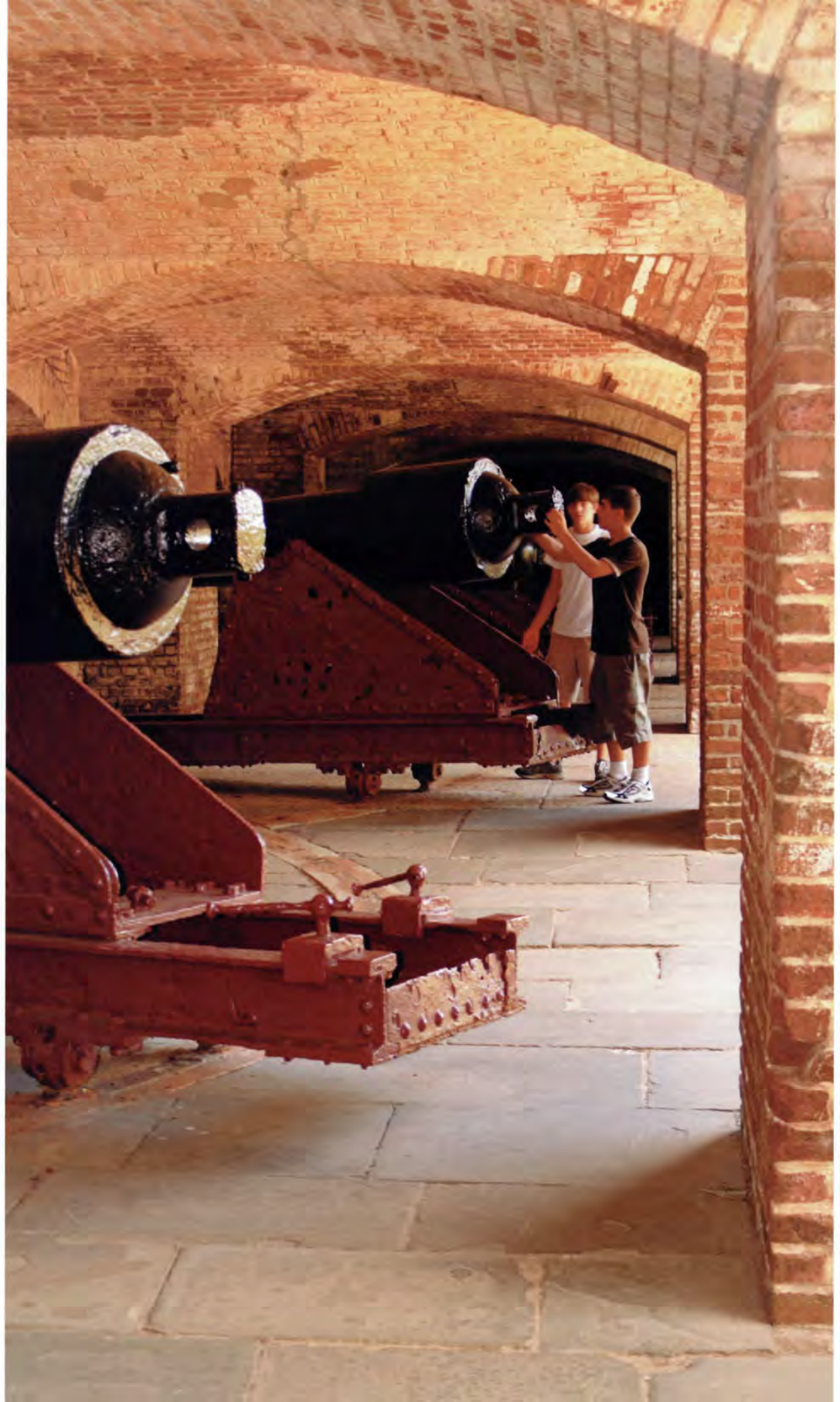
AT FORT SUMTER ON THE SOUTH CAROLINA COAST, THAT THOUGHT FINDS SIMILAR resonance. Opened in 2001, the education center at Liberty Square is where visitors depart by ferry to the fort. There, exhibits updated in 1995 interpret the military history. But the bombardment's context is explained on the mainland.

Fran Norton, chief of interpretation, Carlin Timmons, a park interpreter, and Rick Hatcher, park historian, talk with me enthusiastically about the goals and results of the expanded exhibits and facilities. "Context is the key," says Fran. "To answer the question, 'Why did the war start here?' you have to introduce the economic and social history."

Charleston's importance as a market and shipping center for rice and cotton, slavery's crucial role in the region, and the wide societal differences between then and now are all interpreted at Liberty Square. Military history isn't ignored, either. "Charleston's war didn't end with the bombardment of Fort Sumter," Rick notes. "It was under siege from 1863 to 1865, the longest siege of the Civil War!"

The history of nearby Morris Island, scene of the near suicidal assault on a Confederate redoubt by African American volunteers (depicted in the film *Glory*), is part of the story. Carlin developed a school program about it, which students participate in at the site in the springtime.

Visitors are the chief beneficiaries of the new approach. Nearly a million a year pass through Liberty Square, and about 300,000 ride the ferry out to



Charleston has a long, complex history with critical roles in the slave trade, secession, and a turbulent post-war reconstruction. The exhibits and interpreters shy from none of it. "At Sumter, we can make anybody mad," says the interpretation chief.

the fort. They come from all over the United States, from many foreign countries, from all segments of society.

"When we first opened, there was some negative reaction to our interpretation of the war's causes, but that was always a minority view," Fran says. "Right now the reaction is almost entirely positive."

Some of that minority viewpoint was expressed when the Union flag was exhibited at Liberty Square. The staff fielded some tough comments from a few visitors angry that the Confederate flag wasn't displayed as well. The Union flag was exhibited alone simply because it's in the park's collections, and none of the Confederate banners are.

Charleston has a long, complex history with critical roles in the slave trade, secession, and a turbulent post-war reconstruction. The exhibits and interpreters shy from none of it. "At Sumter, we can make anybody mad," says the interpretation chief.

But they also inform, challenge, and deepen understanding of some of our country's most perilous times.

Charleston's experience pretty well sums up what's happened at other sites with updated exhibits and interpretation. Woody Harrell, superintendent of Shiloh and Corinth battlefields in Tennessee and Mississippi, is responsible for interpretation at both the Shiloh visitor center at Pittsburg Landing, renovated and updated in 1990, and the brand new Corinth Civil War Interpretive Center.

Woody explains to me that the Shiloh center is "for the most part about objects. The topics we interpret include battlefield medicine, weapons, and munitions; the story of the 1862 military campaign; the battle of Shiloh."

A late 1950s film detailing the battle, one of the longest running in the parks, spools continuously. While there are plenty of anachronisms, the story is essentially accurate. And as Woody notes, "A lot of local folks and regulars are deeply attached to that film!"

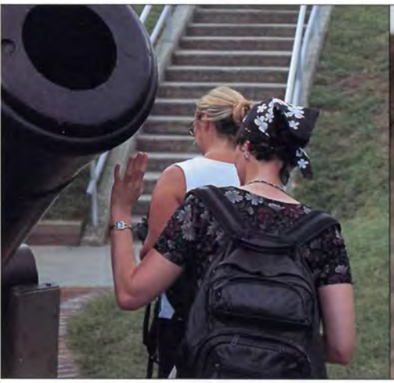
At Shiloh, the park continues to interpret the strategic details of one of the war's most climactic battles. At Corinth, the war is the focus, with the causes, including slavery, discussed in detail.

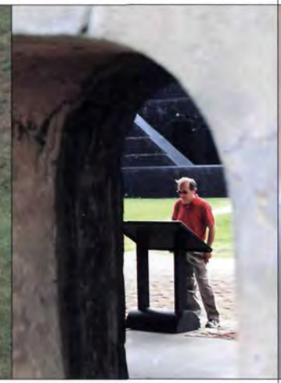
Exhibits, which include the fiery, unequivocal language of the Articles of Secession, explain the significance of the rail crossroads, and the Union's aggressive attempts to capture it, setting the stage for the furious battle at Shiloh Church 23 miles north.

The exhibits also focus on the enormous contraband camp for escaped slaves, established after the town fell to the Union. The camp, a model for others operated by the northern army, included a school, church, commissary, housing, and medical facilities for a community of at least 20,000. Two regiments of African American troops were raised here before the camp closed in 1864.

In the first year of operation, visitors have responded with great enthusiasm. "Maybe two in a thousand have anything negative to say," Woody says. "So far it's been an overwhelming success."

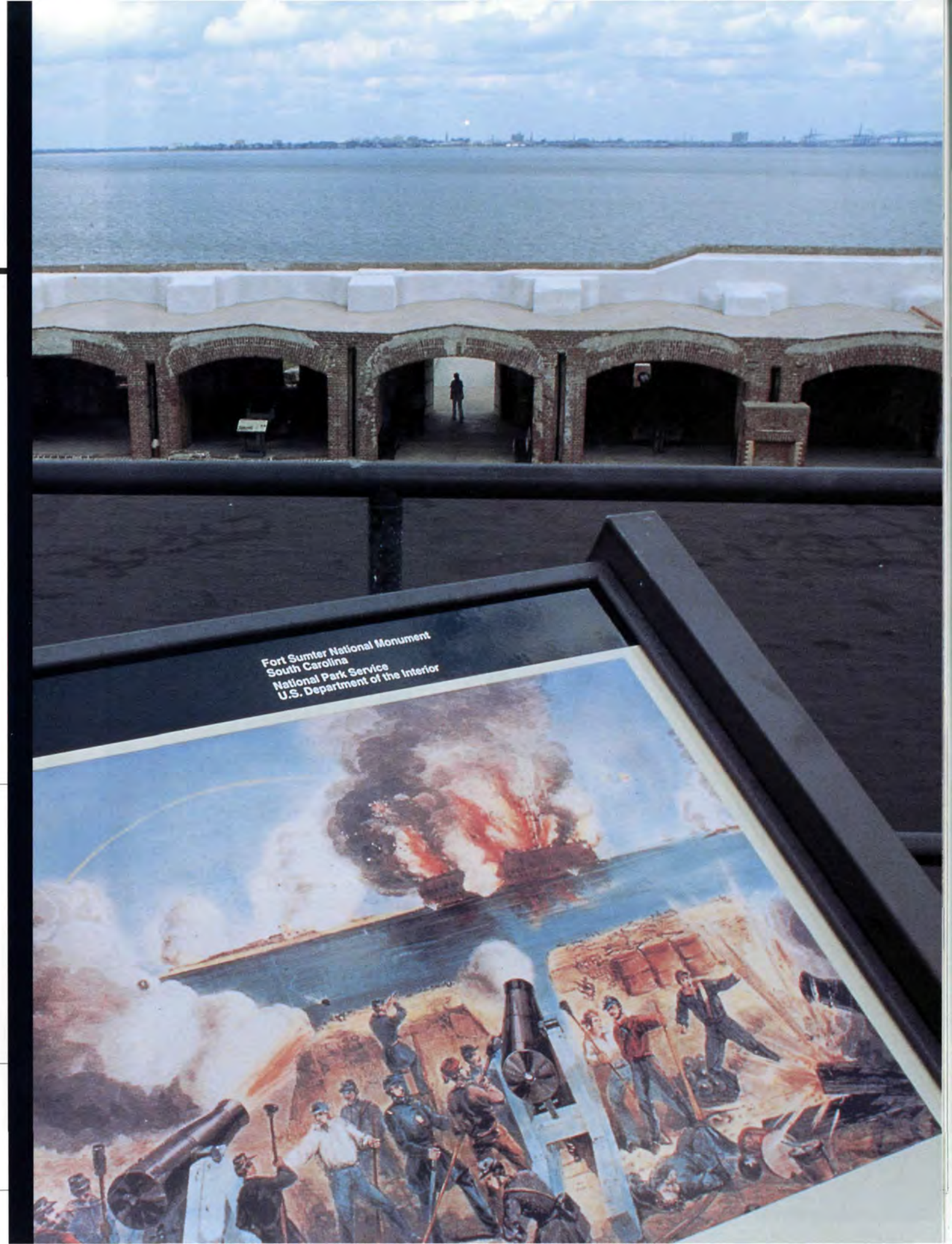
He says that the center fulfills a critical need. "Today's secondary school graduates aren't as well versed in the nation's history as their grandparents. Competing against a broad curriculum, the





Above left: History you can touch at Fort Sumter. **Above center:** The fort's interpretation focuses on the battle, with the context set by the exhibit at the harbor visitor center.

Above: Rounding up stragglers for the ferry back across Charleston harbor. **Right:** Bombarding the fort, below; on the receiving end, above.



Epilogue

"Since these exhibits went in I'm seeing inner-city, African American teachers and classes visiting here in large numbers for the first time," says the interpretation chief . . . More Union colored regiments fought here than in any other theater of war, winning 14 Medals of Honor in the assault of New Market Heights in 1864.

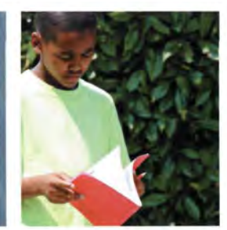
Civil War seems to get precious little time." Woody points to new exhibits at Stone's River and Chickamauga as other noteworthy examples of the interpretive trend—sites that, like his, are trying to close the education gap.

THE SUMMER HEAT HERE ALONG THE JAMES RIVER IS BREATHTAKING, EVEN WELL BEFORE NOON. I'm in the former Confederate capital to have a look at the visitor center at Richmond National Battlefield Park, housed in the remnants of an old industrial complex. Viewed from the parking lot along the riverfront, the building is an imposing red brick structure that retains the muscle of its original identity. This was once a great iron works and munitions factory, which cast over a thousand cannon along with making small arms, ammunition, and plating for ironclads.

The Tredegar Iron Works was the beating heart of the South's war effort, a heart that kept pumping up to the mid-20th century as one of city's principal industries. In this place, the reality of the war was not the shriek of battle, but the din of trip hammers and the grit of foundry labor. Interpretive signs explain the foundry process and Tredegar's role in Richmond's long history before, during, and after the war.

Inside are three floors of insightful exhibits, opened in 2000. The first floor offers a history of Richmond and the battles around it in 1862, 1864, and 1865, with a video and displays of armaments and munitions, some made here. The second floor has maps and visiting suggestions for the battlefields. Yet it's the third floor that really captures the city in time of war.

A wealth of objects and photographs resonates with the ambiance of distressed floors and rough-hewn rafters. An audio called "Richmond Speaks" echoes off the worn brick walls, spinning the city's tale of conflict with a transporting narrative. Images appear and fade, with voiced excerpts from letters and diaries evoking life in the besieged capital. A clerk, too old to go to the front, surmises what must be happening in the trenches while the wounded and amputees walk the streets. A soldier from a Union colored regiment enters the conquered city and for the first time since infancy encounters his mother. A nurse at the Chimborazo Hospital loses her squeamishness at death and suffering, and wonders at the transformation. A Georgia captain writes to his wife, pouring out longing and loneliness and rage at an unknown thief who made off with his only photograph of her.



Left, right: Exhibits at Richmond's Tredegar Iron Works reflect the ruinous reality just outside. Above: Students learn the war chapter and verse thanks to a guide by Ranger Pat Ferrell, keyed to the site; the reward: becoming a Junior Ranger.

There is great power here. These aren't bronzed heroes, they're folks like you and me, with the hot breath of war swirling around them.

After my tour, I spend a little time with Dave Ruth, the chief of interpretation and assistant superintendent. He's been here for 14 years. When I ask about the changes, he says the evolution has been one of addition rather than replacement. "We're still interpreting the details of battlefield history and strategy as we always did. But the story of the war here is very complex. We're telling more of it than ever before, in our exhibits and through our interpreters."

Through the conflict, Richmond remained a city of civilians, and their stories are as compelling as those of the sol-

"To paraphrase John Keegan, the pre-eminent British military historian, 'An army is an expression of the society from which it issues.' There's no way to understand the battle front without understanding the home front."

—John Latschar, Superintendent, Gettysburg National Battlefield

Visitor Voices **Richmond exhibit-goers speak up on what the war means to them**

"The Civil War was fought to defend the rights of all human beings. Slavery has been around since the beginning of time and still is today. You can capture and restrain the body of a man, but you can never contain his soul."

"History is essential. Ignorance is dangerous."

"How could it seem so right then and so wrong now. What a waste of young lives."

"I am proud to be a southerner. The slaves should have been freed and the South should have seceded. Freedom should have been given to all who wanted it, slaves and southerners alike."

"These men had the tenacity and perseverance to go through anything for their viewpoint . . . as an African American, I understand wanting no man to force me to do anything, but I don't know many who stand firmly in their beliefs today . . . freedom [is a] right of choice, but they could not see that for black America."

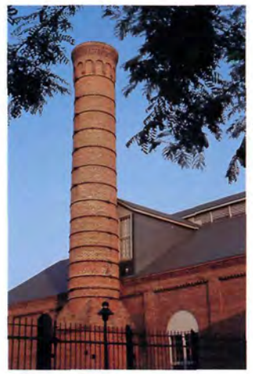
"Madness and arrogance override reason."

"The Civil War means freedom to me. I am the granddaughter of a fourth-generation freed slave from North Carolina."

"It is amazing that it all occurred with such devastation and that a strong nation has emerged. Unbelievable!!!"

"A vicious, catastrophic war, but one that had to be fought, or most likely the United States would not be the great nation it is today."

"Visited on election day 2004. In the midst of a divisive election often called 'the most important of our lives,' it is good to reflect on the unfathomable divisions and consequences that we have survived as a nation . . . God Bless America."



Right: Richmond's war-era works on a warm August evening along the James River, with the statue of Lincoln and his son, below.

diers and political leaders. The city was home to Chimborazo, the largest Confederate hospital for the wounded. All this history is woven into the new approach, the goal a comprehensive picture.

"In general, reaction to the new exhibits, and to the work of our interpreters, has been overwhelmingly positive," Dave says. "Annual visitation is running about 66,000, and we've had very few complaints." Almost a third of visitors are Virginia school kids and their teachers. That's a point of pride for the park. "Since these exhibits went in I'm seeing inner-city, African American teachers and classes visiting here in large numbers for the first time," says the interpretation chief.

The foundry workers were a mix of slaves and white immigrants. More Union colored regiments fought here than in any other theater of war, winning 14 Medals of Honor in the assault of New Market Heights in 1864.

The public reaction is perhaps best expressed at an unobtrusive comment box near the entrance, where the question is posed: "What does the Civil War mean to you?" There is a persistent minority of strident comments about some of the exhibits, but most are thoughtful and often moving [see sidebar]. Surely the proof of effectiveness is in that box.

As I leave, I stop to view the most controversial addition. In 2003, a statue of Abraham Lincoln was erected just outside the entrance. Before its unveiling, there were threats of protest and vigorous complaints from southern heritage organizations. They may have feared a depiction of Lincoln, who toured the city with his young son Todd just a few days after it fell, as a conquering hero with his foot on the neck of a defeated South.

On a bench before me is a life-size bronze that captures a moment of contemplative serenity that any father would recognize instantly. There is no conqueror here, only a quiet man and a small boy.

There's still the occasional complaint, but in general the anger melted away.

"The Civil War was fought to defend the rights of all human beings. Slavery has been around since the beginning of time and still is today. You can capture and restrain the body of a man, but you can never contain his soul." —Visitor Comment, Richmond National Battlefield Park

JOHN LATSCHAR USHERS ME INTO HIS OFFICE ON AN afternoon full of thunderstorms to talk about the challenges of implementing the 1990 legislation that defined the interpretive mission at Gettysburg. John, superintendent since 1994, is a combat veteran with a palpable empathy for the soldiers who fought in the battle. He also holds a doctorate in history. He's a thoughtful, informed, and eloquent advocate for the park. Given the controversy that inevitably accompanies any attempt to change holy ground, it's helpful that John has a thick skin and a droll sense of humor.

The legislation, and the park's more recent general management plan, have guided efforts to tell Gettysburg's story. These efforts led to a set of themes, which include the reasons for the war and its consequences. John received emails urging him not to "dishonor the memory" of the fallen "in the pursuit of political correctness and revisionist history."

The efforts also led to the decision to replace the historic Cyclorama building with a new visitor center. Many long-time visitors, apprehensive of changes, are attached to the venerable structure. The preservation community has been vocal in opposition.

John seems to be taking it in stride. "You always seem to get more negative reaction to what's proposed than to what's actually implemented. I'm pretty confident that when the new facilities are open in 2007, people will like what we've done."

He has ready explanations for the changes. While the park will continue to interpret battle tactics, interpretation doesn't stop there now and won't stop there in the future. "To paraphrase John Keegan, the pre-eminent British military historian, 'An army is an expression of the society from which it issues,'" John says. "There's no way to understand the battle front without understanding the home front."

If the decision to expand interpretation was straightforward, the decision to demolish the Cyclorama building was tough. The structure has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Three factors led to the decision: inadequate climate control for the painting, which has been moisture damaged; not enough space to properly hang it; and the location on Cemetery Ridge, atop the Union position that repulsed the Confederate assault on July 3, 1863, one of the nation's most significant pieces of landscape. As John noted in a letter to a concerned citizen, "the preservation of the battlefield itself is our highest and most important priority."

Ground has been broken for the new center, away from the battle site. Developed with the nonprofit Gettysburg National Battlefield Museum Foundation, it will be large enough to properly display the painting, as well as greatly expand space for exhibits and collections. Much of the battlefield is being restored to 1863, to help visitors understand the conflict's ebb and flow and give a feel for south-central Pennsylvania of the day.

NEAR THE END OF THE INTERVIEW, I FOUND MYSELF ASKING A QUESTION THAT OCCURRED DURING my bicycle tour. I was peddling along the eastern flank of Little Round Top, a place of some significance. Everyone who watched Ken Burns' documentary remembers the struggle atop this rocky, wooded hill, a struggle for the existence of the Union Army.

After repulsing repeated Confederate assaults, Colonel Joshua Chamberlain, a bookish professor with no formal military education or experience before the war, ordered his men to fix bayonets on their now-empty rifles and counterattack down the slope. The Confederates, shocked and surprised, retreated. The army was saved.

It's one of those tales of gallantry that can mask the reality of all those young men lying butchered or badly hurt among these trees and rocks. As I biked along, the gunfire and shouting just an old echo in the woods, I wondered what we should take away from all that bloodshed in long-ago America.

John pauses and looks out his window at a black thunderhead bearing down on the visitor center. He says the answer is in the last election. "The philosophical divisions were profound, even unbridgeable. There were huge regional differences in how people thought and voted. It was in some ways not unlike the election of 1860."

"But you know what? The morning after, about half of us were elated, and the other half of us were angry and bitter, and all of us just got ourselves up, and went off to work. There was no serious talk anywhere of secession or taking up arms against our own countrymen. There was no bloodshed. We don't do that sort of thing anymore."

John turns and looks me in the eye. "That's what the sacrifice of all of those soldiers gave us. We owe them a debt, every last one of them."

For more information on Fort Sumter, contact Fran Norton, (843) 883-3123, ext. 23, fran_norton@nps.gov, or visit the park's web site at www.nps.gov/fosu. At Shiloh, contact Woody Harrell, (731) 689-5275, ext. 24, woody_harrell@nps.gov, or visit www.nps.gov/shil. For Richmond National Battlefield Park, contact Dave Ruth, (804) 226-1981, dave_ruth@nps.gov, or visit www.nps.gov/rich. At Gettysburg, contact John Latschar, (717) 334-1124, john_latschar@nps.gov, or go to www.nps.gov/gett. Reach the author at (717) 705-1482, joebear81@aol.com.

Far and near left: The Gettysburg battlefield is a living landscape of memorials to the fallen.

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VISITING

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY JACK E. BOUCHER

A new family of visitor centers grew up in the national parks of the 1950s and '60s. This recently discovered cache of images gives a glimpse of the brood fresh out of the box.

Left: Its form inspired by Eero Saarinen's Kresge Chapel at MIT, Georgia's Fort Pulaski Visitor Center offered exhibits viewed as one reads a book—left to right—with traffic flowing smoothly clockwise.

Lens legend

Jack Boucher made a find in his basement not long ago, taking him back to his days as a young pup with the National Park Service.

"I was poking around and up pops a trip to days gone by," says Boucher. Now, owing to a box of faded color negatives—since digitally restored—you can go there, too.

Left, above: Hopewell Village Visitor Center, Pennsylvania. The new centers were born as the emerging interstates looked to deliver 80 million visitors by 1966, the 50th anniversary of the National Park Service. Dubbed "the city hall of the park," the building type borrowed from its sibling, the shopping center, a place for people to park and sample a menu of attractions. Visitation had already jumped from 3 to almost 30 million between 1931 and 1948, with the floor of Yosemite Valley a parking lot littered with cars, tents, and refuse. The aptly named visitor center centralized park use, helping prevent random, destructive patterns. Other patterns would soon be gone, too, wished *Progressive Architecture:* "Disappearing, one hopes, are the rustic-rock snuggery and giant-size 'log cabin' previously favored." Some centers, like this one, reconciled traditional and modern. Yet the intent was not to be picturesque, but to demure to the landscape, and accommodate cars and buses using low-cost, efficient materials. The idea, and style, migrated to parks worldwide.

Left: Clingmans Dome Tower, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee. **The Mission 66 Program, launched to cope with skyrocketing visitation, built over 100 visitor centers between 1956 and 1966, stretching the concept to a host of new forms like this observation deck, sited at one of the highest spots in the East.** By the 1950s, American architects had absorbed European modernism, drawn to the idea of aesthetic and technological freedom unfettered by convention. Modern methods and materials, like concrete, lent new power to an old idea: channeling visitors. But not everyone was a fan. Some, shocked by the spread of modernism to the parks, yearned for the rustic styles of old. "Ugly beyond words" is how Devereaux Butcher of the National Parks Association described one of the structures.

Below, right: Flamingo Marina, Florida Bay. The marina, today a beachfront fixture, emerged along with new kinds of national parks like seashores. Flamingo, the handiwork of architect Cecil Doty, featured a lodge, restaurant, gas station, and elaborate dock for cruise boats. Doty, a lifelong National Park Service employee steeped in the rustic style, embraced the free plans, flat roofs, prefab components, and concrete construction. Having witnessed great achievements, from the Empire State Building to the advent of space travel, he said, "How could you help but go away from that board-and-batten stuff?"

Above: Park Housing, Florida. A drive for excellence permeated Doty's buildings, even those hidden from view. This question sums up his standard: "Do you like it, does it please?" He hoped to exude a sense of pride, inspiring stewardship of both structure and site. "Doty's buildings often achieve a kind of timelessness . . . without being cheap rustic imitations or modern spectacles," says Sarah Allaback in *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type.* Doty received the Department of the Interior Distinguished Service Award shortly before retiring.

Left, below: Everglades National Park, Florida. Everglades, with its sweeping flourishes of pure modern, was a showpiece of the Mission 66 Program. Ironically, the program earned acclaim just as the style was fading, with a citation from the American Institute of Architects in 1970. "The architectural elite [had] largely discounted the principle tenets of modernism by the late 1960s," says Sarah Allaback in *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type*. Over the next two decades, architects rejected the style for its more colorful successor, postmodernism. Today, modern architecture in the parks has aged poorly, says Allaback. "Unlike rustic structures, which benefit from a patina of age and wear, modern buildings depend on a crisp, clean aesthetic," she says. "A crumbling rustic wall is considered appropriately antiquated, but a deteriorating gypsum panel only appears shabby." Spare styles can also be damaged by "improvements," says Allaback. "When smooth colored tile is covered with industrial carpet and wood paneling is tacked over window walls, a spacious, sunny lobby becomes dim and utilitarian." Center additions such as bookshops can compromise elements like landscape views, with the demands of a new day sometimes outstripping a structure's original intent. In these images, taken when all was young and new, the original vision lives on.

ARTI
FACT

BREATHTAKING REWARD

JACK BOUCHER/NPS/HABS

PERCHED A MERE 20 FEET FROM THE EDGE OF THE GRAND CANYON, El Tovar was the breathtaking reward for passengers who endured the long ride through the desert on the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway at the beginning of the 20th century. Places like the canyon were new and exotic to most Americans, as was the opportunity to visit them by rail. Part of a plan to boost ridership and tourism, railroad moguls built resort destinations like El Tovar all over the West. **THE HOTEL OPENED ITS DOORS IN 1905,** and as the tourists flooded in, the canyon was imprinted on the national consciousness. El Tovar celebrates its 100th birthday this year. When first built, it was intended as a way to experience the Grand Canyon. Today, El Tovar is an experience in itself, part of the cultural history that has grown around one of the world's greatest natural wonders. **ARCHITECTURALLY ECLECTIC,** the building was designed by Charles Whittlesey, on retainer to the railway during its resort-building spree. Part Swiss chalet and part Norwegian villa, El Tovar has elements of Victorian resort architecture while incorporating the rough and rustic character that was becoming *de rigeur* for American wilderness resorts. While its balconies, terraces, and roof turret express the fussiness of the era, the hotel's peeled logs and unfinished timbers create a woodsy ambiance. **EL TOVAR IS STILL ACCOMMODATING GUESTS,** lured by the Grand Canyon's legend and vistas and perhaps, as suggested by an inscription on the front porch, "Dreams of mountains, as in their sleep they brood on things eternal." **FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.NPS.GOV/GRCA.**

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Common Ground: Preserving Our Nation's Heritage fall 2005 / volume 10, number 3
Published by the National Park Service for the Heritage Community
Formerly Common Ground: Archeology and Ethnography in the Public Interest

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Common Ground is published quarterly. To read online, subscribe, or update your subscription, visit www.cr.nps.gov/CommonGround. To contact the editorial staff, write to Editor, Common Ground, 1849 C Street NW (2286), Washington, DC 20240, or call (202) 354-2100, fax (202) 371-5102, or email NPS_CommonGround@nps.gov.

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PUBLISHER
Sue Waldron

EDITOR AND DESIGNER
David Andrews

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ISSN 1087-9889

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—from "Inside the Rock," page 8

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