National Park Service
Cultural Landscapes Inventory

2015

Revised: 7/2026



Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains

Richmond National Battlefield Park

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Introduction

The Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI)

The Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) is a comprehensive inventory of all cultural landscapes in the National Park System. Landscapes that are listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places, or are otherwise managed as cultural resources and in which the National Park Service has, or plans to acquire, legal interest are included in the inventory. The CLI identifies and documents each landscape's location, size, physical development, landscape characteristics, character-defining features, and condition. Cultural landscapes have approved CLIs when concurrence with the findings is obtained from the park superintendent and all required data fields are entered into the Cultural Resources Information System (CRIS-CL) database. In addition, for landscapes not currently listed on the National Register and/or without adequate documentation, concurrence is required from the State Historic Preservation Officer, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, or the Keeper of the National Register.

Scope of the CLI

The information contained within the CLI is compiled from primary and secondary sources and through on-site surveys of the landscape. The level of investigation is dependent upon scoping the need for information. The baseline information collected provides a comprehensive look at the historical development and significance of the landscape. Documentation and analysis of the existing landscape identifies character-defining characteristics and features and allows for an evaluation of the landscape's integrity and an assessment of the landscape's condition. The CLI also includes historic maps, drawings, and images; photographs of existing conditions; and a site plan that indicates major features. The CLI documents the existing condition of park landscape resources and identifies impacts, threats, and measures to stabilize condition. This information can be used to develop strategies for improved stewardship. Unlike a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR), the CLI does not provide management recommendations or treatment guidelines for the cultural landscape, but it may identify stabilization measures.

The Cultural Resources Information System (CRIS)

CRIS is the National Park Service's database of cultural resources on its lands, consisting of archeological sites, historic structures, ethnographic resources, and cultural landscapes. Cultural Resources Inventory System (CRIS) replaces three legacy inventory systems: ASMIS (archeology), CLI (cultural landscapes), and LCS (historic structures); and it reinstates the former ERI (ethnographic resources). This Cultural Landscape Inventory document reflects the information in a corresponding CRIS Cultural Landscape record.

Statutory and Regulatory Foundation

The legislative, regulatory, and policy directives for conducting and maintaining the CLI within CRIS are:

- National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 (16 USC 470h-2(a)(1)) Sec. 110
- Executive Order 13287: Preserve America, 2003. Sec. 3 (a and c)
- Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Federal Agency Historic Preservation Programs
- Pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act, 1998. Std. 2
- Cultural Resource Management Guideline, 1997, Release No. 5, page 22; issued pursuant to Director's Order #28 (DO-28)

The NHPA requires the identification, evaluation, and nomination of historic properties to the National Register of Historic Places and the maintenance and expansion of an inventory of cultural resources. DO-28 requires a cyclic assessment of the current condition of cultural landscapes based on an assessment interval, with a default of six years.

Use

Beyond fulfilling legal and policy requirements, park staff can use the Cultural Landscape Inventory in the following ways:

- To learn about park cultural landscapes (all staff)
- To inform management decisions (park managers)
- To inform project planning and development (park managers, facility managers, project managers, compliance specialists)
- To monitor the condition of the cultural landscape and take measures to protect its significance and integrity (cultural resource managers, facility managers)
- To recognize the stabilization and treatment needs of landscape features and plan work within cultural landscapes to address the needs (facility managers, cultural resource managers)
- To understand the cultural value of natural systems in a cultural landscape (natural resource managers)
- To create programming and educational materials based on site history (interpretation and education specialists)
- To recognize impacts within cultural landscapes and enforce protection measures (visitor and resources protection staff)

General Information

Property Level and CLI Numbers

Inventory Unit Name: Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains

Resource Level: Component Landscape

CRIS-CL Resource ID: 975920

Parent Landscape: 300092

Inventory Status: Complete

Park Information

Park Name: Richmond National Battlefield Park

Alpha Code: RICH

Park Organization Code: 4800

Region: Northeast

Restricted: Yes

Landscape Description:

Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is located at 7273 Studley Road in Mechanicsville, Virginia, approximately nine miles northeast of Richmond. It is part of Richmond National Battlefield Park, which preserves, protects, interprets, and commemorates Richmond Civil War battlefield landscapes, struggles for the capital of the Confederacy associated with the 1862 Seven Days' Battles, the 1864 Overland Campaign, and the 1884-1865 Richmond and Petersburg Campaigns, including the American military, social, and political history as exemplified by the New Market Heights Battlefield. The site became part of the park in 2006.

The May 28-30, 1864, Battle of Totopotomoy Creek occurred as part of General Ulysses S. Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign, and immediately preceded the May 31-June 12, 1864, Battle of Cold Harbor that ended the campaign. The battle saw the presence of Union soldiers on land owned by the Shelton family and included the construction of earthen fortifications extending to the south, southwest, and west of the Shelton House. These fortifications provided cover for Union infantry and artillery, which engaged their Confederate counterparts on the opposite side of Totopotomoy Creek. During the course of the battle, the house was used as a Union signal station, drawing fire from the Confederate artillery. Its basement hallway was used as a field headquarters by Union General Winfield S. Hancock, and Shelton family members sought refuge in the basement from the artillery bombardment. Despite being struck by more than fifty artillery shells, the house survived the battle, as did all the members of the Shelton family.

The 124-acre Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains occupies an upland knoll overlooking Totopotomoy Creek. Sited atop the knoll is the Shelton House, an architecturally significant dwelling built between 1724-1726. Other cultural features of the property include Union earthworks associated with the May 1864 Battle of Totopotomoy Creek, an early period agricultural outbuilding, access and farm roads, agricultural fields, remnants of a Shelton family burial ground, and ornamental trees and shrubs associated with a former ornamental nursery operation. The site is bounded by Studley Road on the north, Totopotomoy Creek on the west and south, and the Shelton Pointe residential subdivision on the east. To the south, the Bell Creek community occupies a knoll overlooking the creek. The adjacent Wysor property to the south includes an easement protecting surviving Confederate earthworks opposite the Union line on the Shelton property. Land north of Studley Road was formerly part of the Rural Plains property.

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains, part of the Richmond National Battlefield Park Historic District, is significant under National Register of Historic Places Criteria A, C, and D. The site is nationally significant in the area of Military History as the site of the May 28-30, 1864, Battle of Totopotomoy Creek. The site is nationally significant in the area of Commemoration for its association with the Civil War battlefield memorialization and preservation movement. The site is significant at the state level in the area of Agriculture for its long history of continuous agricultural use, spanning colonial, antebellum, and reconstruction periods, and continuing into the twentieth century. The site is nationally significant in the area of Engineering for its remaining military fortifications. The site is significant at the state level in the area of Architecture for the Shelton House as an example of early Georgian architecture in middle Virginia. Lastly the site is nationally significant in the area of Historic (Non-Aboriginal) Archeology for both above-ground and subsurface resources that have the potential to yield information about the battle, as well as the antebellum use of the area. The overall period of significance for Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield extends from c.1725 to 1932, which begins the approximate date of initial construction of the Shelton House and commencement of agricultural land uses, and ends when the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities placed a commemorative plaque on the north property boundary.

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION SUMMARY AND CONDITION

The historic integrity of Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is evaluated by comparing landscape characteristics and features present during the period of significance, ca. 1725-1932, with existing conditions as assessed in 2023. The significance of Rural Plains as the site of the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek is conveyed through the extant Shelton House, which appears much as it did at the time of the battle. The house was used as headquarters for General Winfield Hancock and as a Union signal station, suffering significant damage from Confederate shells as members of the Shelton family sheltered in its basement. The spatial relationships between the house, Studley Road, Totopotomoy Creek, the extant open fields, and the landscape's topographical landforms help foster an understanding of the events of the battle and the challenges faced by the Union Army as it tried to cross the creek. The significance of the battle is further conveyed through the visible remains of the Union earthworks, which at the time of the battle cut across the property from Studley Road to Totopotomoy Creek south of the house. Of the approximately 3,000 feet of earthworks dug by the Union troops within the current property boundary, about half remain discernible today; the remainder was plowed over during previous agricultural activities. The architectural significance of the Shelton House as an early eighteenth-century brick dwelling is evident in the preserved architectural details, materials, and siting. Built in 1725, the house underwent periodic renovations during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, but alterations generally preserved the basic form and structure of the house. Today the Shelton House retains a high degree of integrity for the year 1864, exhibiting an exterior appearance consistent with what was depicted at the time of the battle. The historic layout and operation of the Rural Plains plantation is evident in the existing landscape characteristics, particularly the spatial organization, circulation, and topography. Historic field arrangement is revealed today in existing agricultural fields and one nursery stock area, as well as the hedgerows, berms, ditches, and farm lanes that continue to organize the landscape. Even in areas that have reverted to forest, topographical features and variations in forest vegetation reveal the former field extents. Pear Lane is likely a vestige of an early circulation system that provided field access and accommodated mobility through the plantation.

Since 1932, some landscape characteristics and features at Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains have changed and altered the character of the landscape. The Shelton House was once the nucleus of a complex of more than a dozen structures that provided living quarters, specialized facilities, and storage for the operation of the farm. The loss of historic buildings, including slave quarters, domestic outbuildings, barns, sheds, and other farming structures, has diminished the ability of the landscape to convey its historic spatial organization and the agricultural and domestic operation of the plantation. The establishment of the Rural Plains Nursery in 1927 and the conversion of many of the agricultural fields to ornamental plant production altered the character of the landscape. The reduction in the total area under agricultural cultivation has caused many of the former fields to revert to forest, reducing views and diminishing the feeling of openness that characterized the landscape during the historic period.

Condition:
The overall condition of the landscape is "Good." Efforts by the National Park Service since it acquired the property in 2006 have begun the process of documenting existing conditions, identifying impacts, and stabilizing the resources. Clearing projects recommended in the 2016 Cultural Landscape Report have removed overgrown woodlands, nursery stock, and invasive vegetation; addressed erosion and deterioration of Federal earthworks and other contributing

topographical features; and reopened previously obscured views. A number of projects have also been completed to stabilize the structure of the Shelton House.

Landscape Hierarchy Description:

Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is a component landscape within the Richmond National Battlefield Landscape, which comprises the entire Richmond National Battlefield Park. In addition to Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield, there are nine park units categorized as component landscapes: Beaver Dam Creek Battlefield, Chickahominy Bluff, Cold Harbor Battlefield, Drewry's Bluff, Fort Harrison and vicinity, Gaines' Mill Battlefield, Glendale Battlefield, Malvern Hill Battlefield, and Parker's Battery. Pending additional research, future component landscapes may include North Anna Battlefield and Chimborazo.

Landscape Type:

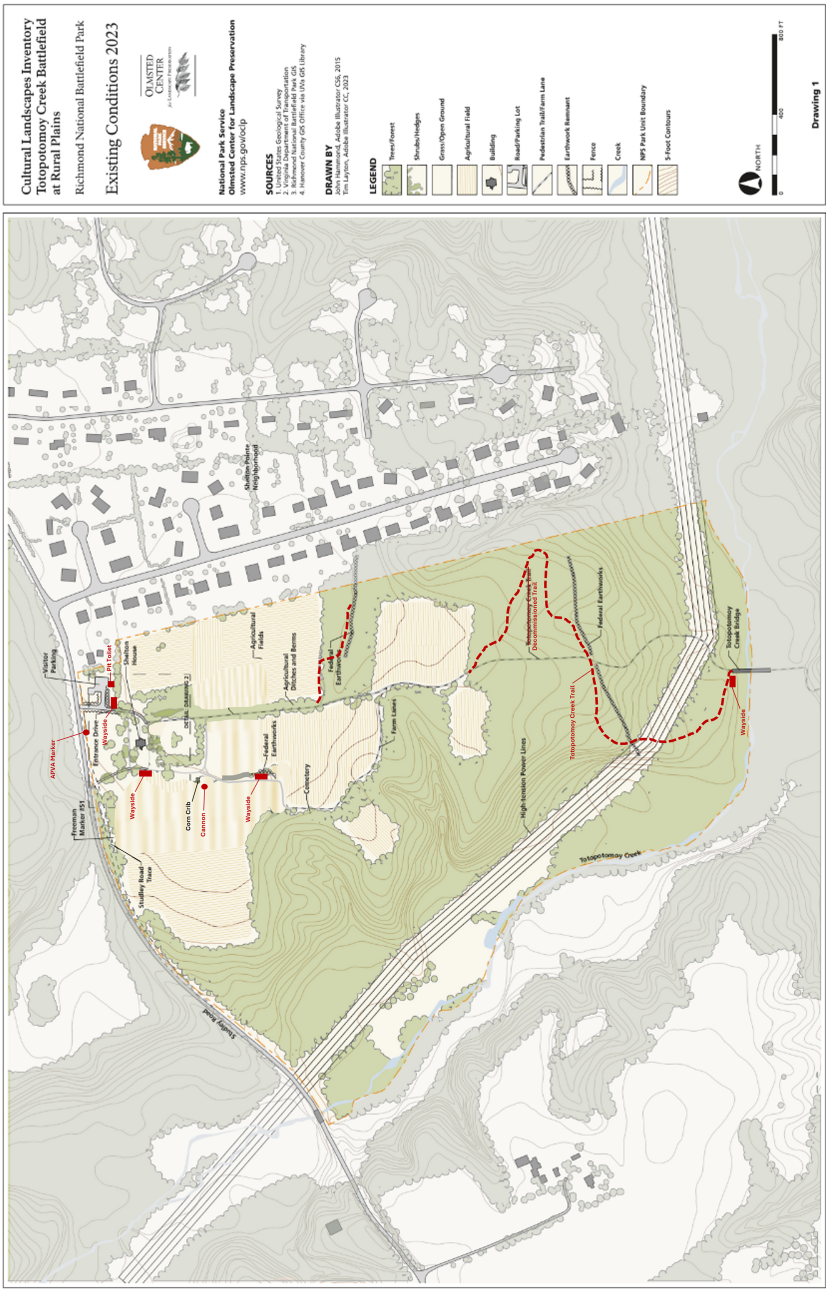
Historic Vernacular Landscape

Historic Site

Other Names:

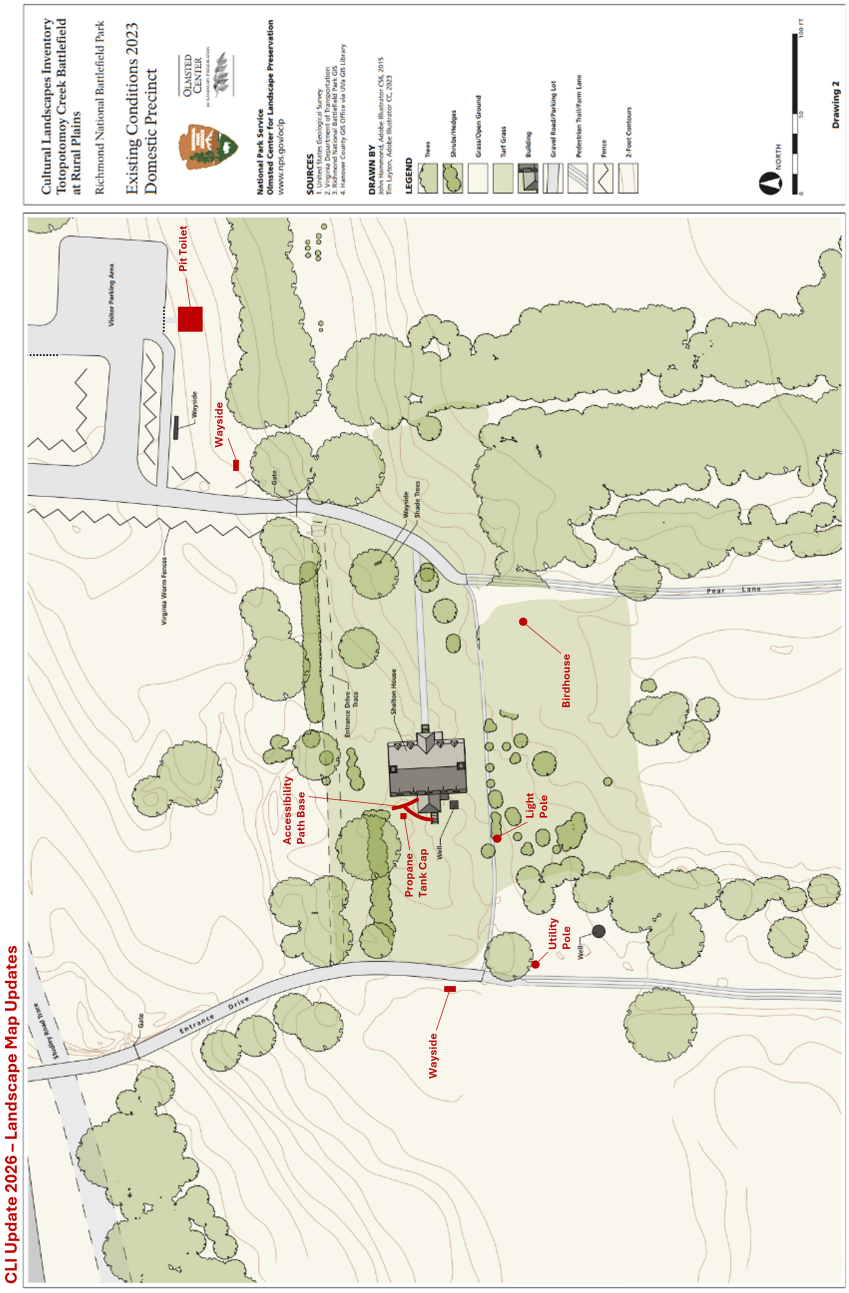
Other Name:	Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield	**Other Name Type:**	Both Current And Historic
Other Name:	Rural Plains	**Other Name Type:**	Both Current And Historic

Site Plan



CLI Update 2026 – Landscape Map Updates

Site plan, 2026 edits.



Site plan, 2026 edits.

Concurrence Information

Superintendent Acknowledgment:

Park Superintendent Acknowledgment: Yes

Park Superintendent Acknowledgment Date: 09/15/2015

Completion Status Explanatory Narrative:

The original CLI for Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield was approved by the Superintendent on September 15, 2015. It was written by John Hammond, Historical Landscape Architect, Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation in Boston. Site visits were conducted by Eliot Foulds, Historical Landscape Architect, Dorothy Friday, SCA Conservation Associate, and John Hammond in October 2014 and April 2015. This CLI is based in part on the "Cultural Landscape Report, Part 1: Totopotomoy Creek Unit, Richmond National Battlefield Park" completed by Dutton and Associates and Liz Sargent in 2010. The CLR in turn drew from prior reports, including the "Shelton House at Rural Plains, Historic Structures Report," prepared by Barbara Yocum in 2012, and the "Rural Plains/Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield Cultural Landscape Study," prepared by Tonia Horton and Lauren Noe in 2009, as well as primary and other secondary sources.

This update was completed by Meaghan Papeika, Architectural Historian, and Tim Layton, Historical Landscape Architect, and reviewed by Jeff Killion, Historical Landscape Architect, at the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation. Field work was completed in February 2023 by Layton and Papeika. The cultural resource contact for the park is Lexie Lowe, Park Archeologist, who may be reached at alexandra_lowe@nps.gov or 804-904-7443.

SUMMARY OF CLI REVISIONS, 2026

--The management category for the landscape remains, "Must be Preserved and Maintained."
--The areas and period of significance are Military, Agriculture, Commemoration, Architecture, Engineering, and Historic Archeology (Non-Aboriginal) for 1724-1932. The areas and periods of significance align with the 2018 National Register documentation.
--Updates to the Chronology and Physical History sections document changes in the landscape since 2015.
--Inventoried features in the Analysis and Evaluation chapter are consistent with the findings of the 2018 National Register. The exception is Pear Lane, which is evaluated in the National Register as a noncontributing feature but evaluated in the 2015 CLI and this update CLI as contributing; the road was present during the historic period. The Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities marker is a contributing feature in the National Register but is not evaluated in this CLI Update because it is not owned or maintained by the NPS. The Archeological Sites section is revised to direct readers to the 2018 National Register documentation. A pit toilet is a new noncontributing feature. A bell inventoried in the CLI has since been removed.
--The overall landscape condition was evaluated as "Fair" in 2015. The proposed landscape condition evaluation for 2026 is "Good."
--Updates to existing condition photographs and the site map.

Concurrence Graphic Information:

2015-0947

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Northeast Region
United States Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

IN REPLY REFER TO:
A.1.2 (NER-RSS)

8/18/2015

RECEIVED
AUG 24 2015
DEPARTMENT OF
HISTORIC RESOURCES

Julie Langan
Director & State Historic Preservation Officer
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
Commonwealth of Virginia
2801 Kensington Avenue
Richmond, VA 23221

Dear Ms. Langan:

Enclosed you will find a copy of the Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI) for the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains, Richmond National Battlefield Park. We seek to reconfirm our agreement on previously evaluated resources and your concurrence on the status of previously unevaluated resources and features identified in this CLI for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The report has been prepared by a team of historical landscape architects with the National Park Service (NPS) Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation. The CLI program and the enclosed report continue the NPS efforts to update our cultural resource inventories.

Through the CLI program, the NPS is currently in the midst of a nationwide effort to inventory its cultural landscapes. The CLI is conducted in accordance with Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended). It is an inventory of baseline information for all historically significant cultural landscapes within the national park system, and it examines multiple landscape features that contribute to the significance of historic properties. The CLI process includes gathering information from existing secondary sources and conducting on-site reconnaissance of the existing landscape. The information collected provides a comprehensive look at the historical development and significance of the landscape, placing it in context of the property's overall significance. For landscapes found potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the evaluation describes their character-defining features and assesses the landscape's overall historical integrity. It also raises questions about the landscape that need further study.

It is important to note that the CLI reports are not intended as comprehensive inventory reports for any one property, although for some properties they provide fuller documentation than for others. For example, the reports do not include a full architectural description of structures, but document structures as elements of the overall landscape, and similarly documents other characteristics such as vegetation, spatial organization, and views and vistas. The CLI is one component of the NPS inventory effort that also includes cultural resource inventories for historic structures, archeological sites, ethnographic resources, and museum objects. For

SHPO concurrence letter, September 23, 2015 (6 pages).

example, the NPS List of Classified Structures inventory includes structural features of cultural landscapes, but the CLI takes a more encompassing approach to the properties, inventorying all above-ground features in each park in which the NPS has a legal or mandated interest.

Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is part of Richmond National Battlefield Park (NBP), which encompasses a series of non-contiguous sites authorized on March 2, 1936 "for the purpose of protecting, managing, and interpreting the resources associated with the Civil War battles in and around the City of Richmond, Virginia," and established on July 14, 1944. The park acquired the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains property in June 2006.

Richmond NBP was administratively listed without documentation in the National Register of Historic Places on October 15, 1966 with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act. Initial documentation of resources occurred on January 16, 1973 when the park was listed on the Virginia Landmark Register under the name "Richmond National Battlefield Park." For this listing, a National Register form was prepared but was not approved by the Keeper of the National Register. The documentation accepted by Virginia indicated that the site was significant under Criterion A in the areas of politics and social/humanitarian, Criterion C in the area of architecture, and Criterion D for archeology (historic-aboriginal). The period of significance was identified as the nineteenth century, but no specific dates were given. The documentation itemized resources under four headings: earthworks (11 areas), monuments (approximately 80), Watt House, and Garthright House. An update to this documentation is currently underway.

On June 5, 1975, Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains was documented in the National Register under the name "Rural Plains." Significance for the 125-acre property was identified under Criterion A in the areas of social and politics and Criterion C in the area of architecture. The period of significance was listed as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but no specific dates were given. The documentation described the Shelton House in detail, but the only mention of the landscape was the grove of trees above the creek in which the house was located. It also noted that the house was the home of the Shelton family for nine generations, and may have been where Sarah Shelton married Patrick Henry in 1754.

On February 18, 2000, the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) "The Civil War in Virginia, 1861-1865: Historic and Archeological Resources" was accepted by the Keeper of the National Register. The MPDF identified property types and historic contexts with which to evaluate historic and archeological resources related to the Civil War. The six property types were battlefields, earthworks, campsites, military hospitals, military headquarters, and military prisons. Richmond NHB was identified under the battlefields and earthworks property types under Criteria A, C, and D. The historic contexts were organized by the Civil War campaigns in Virginia, most of which were conducted along the principal transportation routes. The Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield from May 29-31, 1864, was described as part of the Overland Campaign.

On October 5, 2009, the your office concurred with the National Park Service on the eligibility of numerous resources at the park as part of as an update to the List of Classified Structures (LCS). Three resources were identified at Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield. "Rural Plains" (Shelton House) was described as significant under Criteria A and C for its architecture as well as a MPDF military headquarters property type because of its use as a headquarters for Union troops during the May 1864 battle. "Freeman Marker #51: Totopotomoy Line" was described as

Sincerely,

Jim Comiskey
Acting Associate Regional Director, RSS

Enclosure

cc:
Superintendent, Richmond National Battlefield Park

I concur with the National Park Service categorizations of the landscape resources and features at Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains, Richmond National Battlefield Park, as contributing and non-contributing.

for M. Amanda Lee
Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer
M. Amanda Lee
Historic Preservationist
Division of Review and Compliance

23 September 2015
Date

NPS Cultural Landscapes Inventory – Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains
Richmond National Battlefield Park
List of Contributing and Non-Contributing Landscape Features
August 2015

Contributing Landscape Characteristics & Associated Features

The following landscape characteristics and associated features contribute to the property's historic character, though not all are considered countable resources according to the National Register of Historic Places. Features marked with a (*) were described in the site's National Register documentation on June 5, 1975. Features marked with a (#) were identified as contributing resources by the Virginia State Historic Preservation Office on October 5, 2009.

Natural Systems and Features
Totopotomoy Creek

Land Use
Agricultural Land Use

Topography
Federal Earthworks Totopotomoy Creek
Agricultural Ditches and Berms
Banks along Pear Lane

Vegetation
Large Shade Trees at Shelton House
Ornamental Vegetation at Shelton House

Circulation
Studley Road
Pear Lane
Farm Lanes
Entrance Drive

Buildings and Structures
* # Shelton House
Corn Crib

Small-Scale Features
Cemetery Headstones
Freeman Marker #51: Totopotomoy Line
APVA Commemorative Marker

Non-Contributing Landscape Characteristics & Associated Features

Natural Systems and Features
Woodlands

Vegetation
Nursery Stock Fields
Boxwood Fields

Circulation
Parking Area
Contemporary Trails
Social Trails

Buildings and Structures
Totopotomoy Creek Footbridge
Power Line Poles

Small-Scale Features
Wooden Power Line Poles
Signs and Waysides
Fencing and Gates
Bell
Wellheads
Benches

Undetermined Landscape Characteristics & Associated Features

Land Use
Cemetery Land Use

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES INVENTORY
CONCURRENCE FORM

Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains
Richmond National Battlefield Park

Richmond National Battlefield Park concurs with the findings of the Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) for Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains, including the following specific components:

MANAGEMENT CATEGORY: Must Be Preserved and Maintained

CONDITION ASSESSMENT: Fair

Good: indicates the inventory unit shows no clear evidence of major negative disturbance and deterioration by natural and/or human forces. The inventory unit's cultural and natural values are as well preserved as can be expected under the given environmental conditions. No immediate corrective action is required to maintain its current condition.

Fair: indicates the inventory unit shows clear evidence of minor disturbances and deterioration by natural and/or human forces, and some degree of corrective action is needed within 3-5 years to prevent further harm to its cultural and/or natural values. If left to continue without the appropriate corrective action, the cumulative effect of the deterioration of many of the character defining elements will cause the inventory unit to degrade to a poor condition.

Poor: indicates the inventory unit shows clear evidence of major disturbance and rapid deterioration by natural and/or human forces. Immediate corrective action is required to protect and preserve the remaining historical and natural values.

The Cultural Landscape Inventory for Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is hereby approved and accepted.

9/15/2015

Superintendent, Richmond National Battlefield Park Date

Park concurrence form, September 15, 2015.

significant under Criterion A for its association with the commemoration of the Civil War at Richmond NBP by the Battlefield Markers Association and the Richmond Battlefields Park Corporation. "Federal Earthworks at Totopotomoy Creek" was described as significant under Criteria A, C, and D as a MPDF earthworks property type for its association with the Civil War.

The enclosed CLI for Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains fully evaluates the cultural landscape, particularly the associated landscape characteristics and features. As noted previously, three of the property's features compiled on the attached list have been listed in or determined as eligible for listing in the National Register. The CLI identifies sixteen additional features related to natural systems, land use, topography, vegetation, circulation, buildings and structures, and small-scale features that also contribute to the significance and historic character of the property's landscape.

We call your particular attention to the Landscape Description, National Register Information and the Statement of Significance, and Analysis and Evaluation Summary in the enclosed CLI.

Based on the CLI, we seek to reconfirm our agreement on previously evaluated resources and your concurrence on the status of resources and features identified in this CLI:

- Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is significant at the national level under Criterion A in the area of military history as the site of the May 29-31, 1864 Battle of Totopotomoy Creek and its June 1 aftermath, which occurred as part of Union Lt. General Ulysses S. Grant's Overland Campaign.
- The property is significant at the national level under Criterion A in the area of commemoration for its association with the Civil War battlefield memorialization and preservation movement, which led to two commemorative markers being placed on or adjacent to the Rural Plains property.
- The property is significant at the state level under Criterion A in the area of agriculture for its representation of a continuum of Virginia plantation life and settlement that spans the eighteenth century through the early twentieth century.
- The Shelton House is significant at the state level under Criterion C in the area of architecture as a surviving example of early-eighteenth-century Georgian architecture within eastern Hanover County.
- The property is significant under Criterion D in the area of archeology. Recent archeological investigations at Rural Plains have yielded, and may be expected to continue to yield, important information about the use and features of the property present during the period of significance.
- The property's period of significance begins c.1725, the approximate date of construction of the Shelton House, and ends in 1932, when the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities erected a commemorative sign on the property.
- Overall, the landscape retains integrity to its period of significance (c.1725-1932), primarily through its location, design, and association.
- The categorization of contributing, non-contributing, and undetermined landscape characteristics and features (see attached list).

If you concur with these findings, we ask that you please sign on the space provided and return this letter to Jeff Killion, CLI Coordinator (Address: National Park Service, Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, 15 State Street, 6th Floor, Boston, MA 02109). We would appreciate your response at your earliest convenience. Thank you for your attention to this inventory. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Mr. Killion at 617-223-5053.

Cultural Landscapes Inventory
CLI Update Certification Form
2026

Richmond National Battlefield Park
Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains

Richmond National Battlefield Park certifies the CLI update for the following site,

CONDITION ASSESSMENT: Good – Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains

Good: indicates the property shows no clear evidence of major negative disturbance and deterioration by natural and/or human forces. The inventory unit's cultural and natural values are as well preserved as can be expected under the given environmental conditions. No immediate corrective action is required to maintain its current condition.

Fair: indicates the property shows clear evidence of minor disturbances and deterioration by natural and/or human forces, and some degree of corrective action is needed within 3-5 years to prevent further harm to its cultural and/or natural values. If left to continue without the appropriate corrective action, the cumulative effect of the deterioration of many of the character defining elements, will cause the property to degrade to a poor condition.

Poor: indicates the property shows clear evidence of major disturbance and rapid deterioration by natural and/or human forces. Immediate corrective action is required to protect and preserve the remaining historical and natural values.

The CLI update for the site listed above at Richmond National Battlefield Park is hereby approved and accepted.

JENIFER EGGLESTON Digitally signed by JENIFER EGGLESTON Date: 2026.07.31 08:45:52 -04'00'

Superintendent, Richmond National Battlefield Park Date

Park concurrence form, July 31, 2026.

Seq. No.	File Name	Caption

Revision:

Revised By	Type of Revision	Revision Date	Revision Explanatory Narrative
Jeff Killion	CLI Update	07/31/2026	Three levels of effort have been developed for CLI Updates: A, B, and C. Level C is limited to a condition reassessment of the landscape; Level B includes C and is a targeted update of select data fields; Level A includes C and is a comprehensive update of all data fields. This 2026 update to the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield CLI has been conducted at a Level B effort.

Geographic Information

State and County:

State/Territory	County
Virginia	Hanover County

Area (Acres): 124.4

Land Tract Number(s)

The Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains Unit comprises one land tract (01-118).

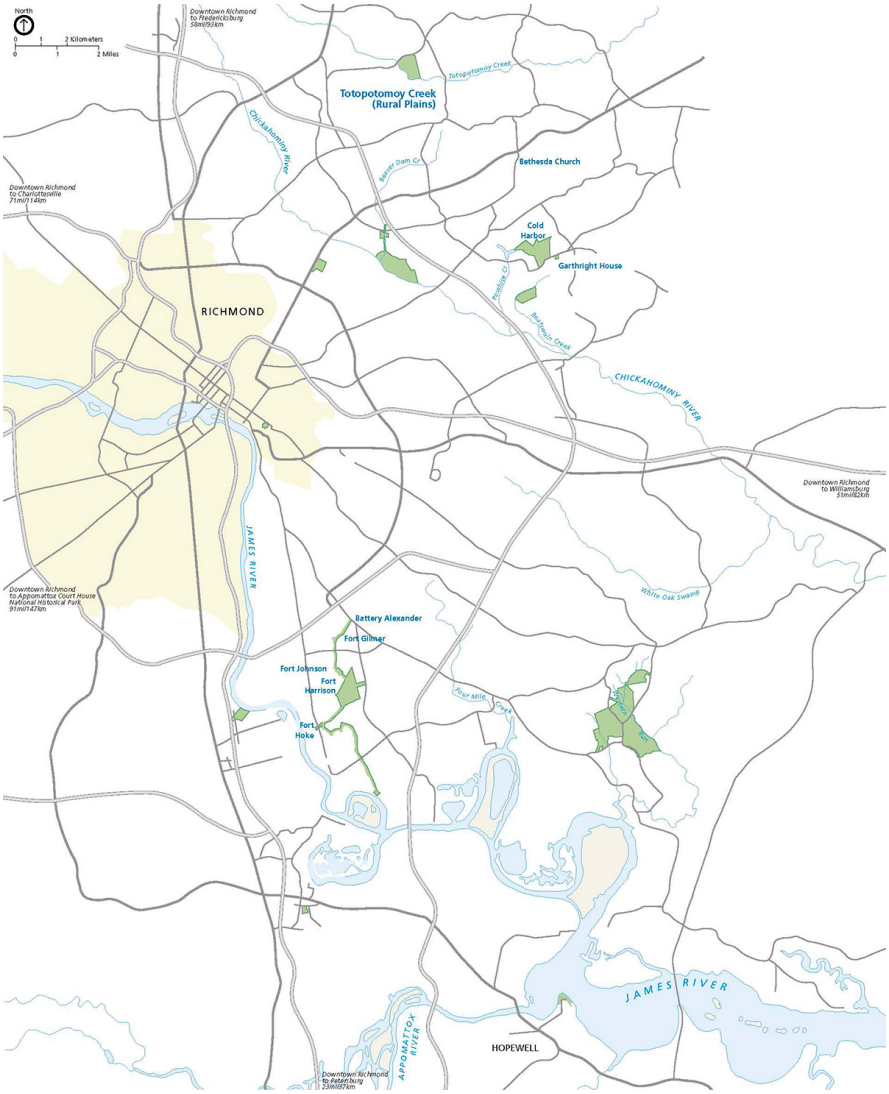
Boundary Description:

The boundary of the cultural landscape coincides with the boundary of the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains Unit, which is bounded by Studley Road on the north, Totopotomoy Creek on the west and south, and the Shelton Pointe residential subdivision on the east.

Boundary Coordinates

Source	Type of Point	Latitude	Longitude	Narrative
	Polygon	37.66167398	-77.3457819	
	Polygon	37.66107959	-77.34558375	
	Polygon	37.6611615	-77.34521085	
	Polygon	37.65312968	-77.34254873	
	Polygon	37.65257772	-77.3439159	
	Polygon	37.65249133	-77.34737579	
	Polygon	37.6532368	-77.34845768	
	Polygon	37.65537333	-77.34933724	
	Polygon	37.65924792	-77.35188275	
	Polygon	37.66067787	-77.35024008	
	Polygon	37.66128047	-77.34865348	
	Polygon	37.66167398	-77.3457819	

Location Map:



Map showing the location of Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains (top of map) in relation to the city of Richmond and surrounding Richmond NBP units. (NPS)

Regional Landscape Contexts:

Type of Context: Physiographic

Description:

This context concerns the large-scale physical forms and patterns of the landscape such as hill, plateau, ravine, drumlin, etc. The Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield unit is located in Hanover County, northeast of the City of Richmond (see Regional Landscape Context graphic). Hanover County and the City of Richmond are part of a transition zone between the Tidewater region of Virginia and the Piedmont Plateau region of Virginia, where the coastal flats turn into the Appalachian foothills. Totopotomoy Creek is located in the eastern, coastal plain portion of the area. The terraced landscape in this area surrounds rivers, marshes, and other tributaries of the York River and the Chesapeake Bay.

In the Tidewater Region of Virginia (an alluvial terrace), land is relatively flat except for ravines and escarpments along tributaries and rivers. The Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield is located along Totopotomoy Creek and includes the creek and surrounding wetlands. The property has an elevation of 90 feet at the creek, with a series of ravines leading up to a flat portion of land with the main house structure at an elevation of about 180 feet.

Totopotomoy Creek, located along the western and southern boundaries of the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield, is part of the Pamunkey River watershed. Totopotomoy Creek drains over 25 square miles. The watershed is primarily forested, although nearly one-third remains in agricultural production. Residential development extends over more than ten percent of the watershed. A small area remains in wetlands.

Type of Context: Cultural

Description:

This context concerns the general human overlay on the physical form of the landscape. The area around Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains has been predominantly agricultural through most of the twentieth century. During the late twentieth century, the growth of Richmond led to increased suburban residential development in Hanover County. The county's population grew 36 percent between 1990 and 2000 to 86,320, and over the next seven years grew to an estimated 100,721. The majority of this growth was in the form of small-lot residential subdivisions, including the Shelton Pointe neighborhood, constructed in c.1998 adjoining the Rural Plains property to the east. Despite this development, the area remains largely rural. Hanover County supports farms that produce, "small grains, corn, soybeans, hogs, and beef cattle. A few farms raise sheep, poultry, or dairy cattle. Much of the county is wooded. Wood products are important to the economy of the county." (Hodges et.al. 1980: 1)

Type of Context: Political

Description:

This context concerns the overlay imposed on the landscape through general land use, zoning, legal restrictions, transportation, utilities, population, and political jurisdiction (e.g., state, county, city, borough, or village). Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is a unit of Richmond National Battlefield Park, itself a park unit of the NPS. The site is located in Mechanicsville, Virginia in Hanover County.

Management Information

General Management Information

Management Category:	Category A (High NPS Priority for Preservation and Maintenance)
Management Category Date:	09/15/2015

Management Category Narrative:

As approved on September 15, 2015, Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains meets the "Category A, High NPS Priority for Preservation and Maintenance (formerly "Must be Preserved and Maintained") management category because the property is related to the park's legislated significance and is nationally significant as defined by National Register of Historic Places criteria.

The 1936 enabling legislation for Richmond National Battlefield Park, amended in 1995, states, "In order to preserve the site of the 1862 Peninsula Campaign and the 1864-65 battle of Richmond, in the vicinity of Richmond, Virginia, as a national battlefield park for the benefit and inspiration of the people of the United States, there is hereby established, subject to existing rights, the Richmond National Battlefield Park." In 2018 the property was identified as nationally significant under Criteria A, C, and D of the National Register of Historic Places, as part of the Richmond National Battlefield Park Historic District. (Act of March 2, 1936, Chapter 113; 49 Stat. 1155; NR 2018, Sec.8: 41-43)

Management Agreements:

Type of Agreement: Other

Management Agreement Expiration Date:

Management Agreement Narrative:

Richmond NBP issues agricultural leases every 5-6 years. (PEPC 129784)

Legal Interests:

Type of Interest: Fee Simple

Legal Interest Narrative: The Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains Unit comprises one land tract (01-118) owned in fee simple by the National Park Service. A privately owned tract (01-122), containing portions of the creek bottomlands at the south end of the park unit, lies within the legislated boundary but is outside of the managed area of the park. The Totopotomoy Battlefield at Rural Plains Foundation owns a right-of-way (01-123) through this private parcel for the trail and bridge over Totopotomoy Creek

Located in managed wilderness?: No

Adjacent Lands Information

Do Adjacent Lands Contribute? Yes

Adjacent Lands Narrative:

Adjacent lands are lands outside the cultural landscape boundary, including lands inside or outside the park. The adjacent Wysor property to the south includes an easement protecting surviving Confederate earthworks opposite the Union line on the Shelton property. Land north of Studley Road was formerly part of the Rural Plains property.

National Register Information

National Register of Historic Places

Eligibility: Listed

Eligibility Date: 9/23/2015 12:00:00 AM

Significance Level: National

Contributing: Individual

Classification: Site

Documentation Narrative Description:

Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is part of Richmond National Battlefield Park (NBP), which encompasses a series of non-contiguous sites authorized on March 2, 1936 “for the purpose of protecting, managing, and interpreting the resources associated with the Civil War battles in and around the City of Richmond, Virginia,” and established on July 14, 1944. The park acquired the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains property in June 2006.

Richmond NBP was administratively listed without documentation in the National Register of Historic Places on October 15, 1966 with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act. Initial documentation of resources occurred on January 16, 1973 when the park was listed on the Virginia Landmark Register under the name “Richmond National Battlefield Park.” For this listing, a National Register form was prepared but was not approved by the Keeper of the National Register. The documentation accepted by Virginia indicated that the site was significant under Criterion A in the areas of politics and social/humanitarian, Criterion C in the area of architecture, and Criterion D for archeology (historic-aboriginal). The period of significance was identified as the nineteenth century, but no specific dates were given. The documentation itemized resources under four headings: earthworks (11 areas), monuments (approximately 80), Watt House, and Garthright House.

On June 5, 1975, Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains was documented in the National Register under the name “Rural Plains.” Significance for the 124-acre property was identified under Criterion A in the areas of Social and Politics and Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The period of significance was listed as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but no specific dates were given. The documentation described the Shelton House in detail, but the only mention of the landscape was the grove of trees above the creek in which the house was located. It also noted that the house was the home of the Shelton family for nine generations, and may have been where Sarah Shelton married Patrick Henry in 1754.

On February 18, 2000, the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) “The Civil War in Virginia, 1861-1865: Historic and Archeological Resources” was accepted by the Keeper of the National Register. The MPDF identified property types and historic contexts with which to evaluate historic and archeological resources related to the Civil War. The six property types were battlefields, earthworks, campsites, military hospitals, military headquarters, and military prisons. Richmond NHB was identified under the battlefields and earthworks property types under Criteria A, C, and D. The historic contexts were organized by the Civil War campaigns in Virginia, most of which were conducted along the principal transportation routes. The Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield from May 29-31, 1864, was described as part of the Overland Campaign.

On October 5, 2009, the Virginia State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with the NPS on the eligibility of numerous resources at the park as part of as an update to the Historic Structures Inventory (formerly List of Classified Structures). Three resources were identified at Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield. "Rural Plains" (Shelton House) was described as significant under Criteria A and C for its architecture as well as a MPDF military headquarters property type because of its use as a headquarters for Union troops during the May 1864 battle. "Freeman Marker #51: Totopotomoy Line" was described as significant under Criterion A for its association with the commemoration of the Civil War at Richmond NBP by the Battlefield Markers Association and the Richmond Battlefields Park Corporation. "Federal Earthworks at Totopotomoy Creek" was described as significant under Criteria A, C, and D as a MPDF earthworks property type for its association with the Civil War.

On September 23, 2015, the Virginia SHPO concurred with the findings of the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains CLI. The CLI identified sixteen additional features related to natural systems, land use, topography, vegetation, circulation, buildings and structures, and small-scale features that also contribute to the significance and historic character of the property's landscape. The CLI identified areas of significance at the national level under Criteria A (Military, Conservation, and Commemoration) and Criterion D, as well as at the state level under Criteria A (Agriculture) and C (Architecture). The period of significance was listed as beginning c.1725, the approximate date of construction of the Shelton House, and ending in 1932, when the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities erected a commemorative sign on the property.

On April 27, 2018, the Keeper accepted the first comprehensive park-wide National Register documentation for Richmond NBP (the Virginia SHPO approved an earlier draft on March 7, 2017). According to the documentation, the district is primarily significant as the site of major Civil War battlefields and related properties associated with the Union's attempts to take the Confederate capital city of Richmond during the Peninsula Campaign of 1862, the Overland Campaign of 1864, and the Richmond-Petersburg Campaign of 1864–1865. Significance for the 2879.42-acre federally owned historic district was identified under criteria A, B, C, and D at the national level in the areas of Military, Ethnic Heritage-Black, Conservation, Other (Commemoration), Science, Engineering, Architecture, Archeology- Historic (Non-Aboriginal), and Archeology-Prehistoric. Robert E. Lee, George B. McClellan, and Ulysses S. Grant were identified as significant persons, and the district's contributing commemorative monuments were evaluated as meeting Criteria Consideration F (Commemorative Properties) because they possess significance engendered from their age, design, and symbolic values. The period of significance for the district was listed as c.1720-1944, beginning with the construction of the Garthright House and ending when the NPS officially accepted management of Richmond NBP. The period of significance was listed as 1725-1864 for historic archeology. The documentation identified the entire site as a contributing resource, along with nine other contributing features (see Analysis and Evaluation chapter). An amendment to the National Register documentation is currently underway, which will address 635 acres of North Anna Battlefield (new park unit, acquired from ABT c. 2016/2017); a 50-acre tract at Cold Harbor, which includes Fort Fletcher; 380 acres at Malvern Hill; and 15 acres at Glendale.

According to research conducted for this CLI and the categories of National Register documentation outlined in the "CLI Professional Procedures Guide," the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains at Richmond NBP is adequately documented based on the existing National Register documentation and previous correspondences with the Virginia SHPO. The period of significance has been defined in existing documentation, and the areas of significance encompass the property's agricultural landscape. Therefore, for purposes of the CLI, the property is considered "Listed-Documented."

Pre-CLI Documentation Status: Listed - Documented

CLI SHPO/THPO Concurrence Date: 9/23/2015 12:00:00 AM

CLI Concurrence Narrative:

Concurrence from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (SHPO) on the original CLI (2015) was received on September 23, 2015. The SHPO had no comments on the report.

Statement of Significance for National Register of Historic Places:

Richmond National Battlefield Park:
The Richmond National Battlefield Park Historic District (the District) is significant at the national level under National Register of Historic Places Criteria A, B, C, and D. The District is primarily significant under Criterion A in the area of Military as the site of major Civil War battlefields and related properties associated with the Union's attempts to take the Confederate capital city of Richmond during the Peninsula Campaign of 1862, the Overland Campaign of 1864, and the Richmond-Petersburg Campaign of 1864–1865. The District has additional significance under Criterion A in the areas of Military and Ethnic Heritage: Black for the valiant role played by United States Colored Troops in the September 29–30, 1864, Battle of Chaffin's Farm/New Market Heights. Under Criterion B in the area of Military, the District is significant for its associations with Union Major General George B. McClellan and Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant and Confederate General Robert E. Lee, each of whom devised the strategy and tactics that led to and determined the outcome of the battles fought around Richmond in 1862 and 1864–1865. (NR 2018: Sec.8: 43)

The early twentieth-century efforts to commemorate and preserve the Richmond battlefields are related to national trends in the veneration and protection of Civil War battlefields and lend the District significance under Criterion A in the areas of Commemoration and Conservation. The Richmond Weather Station at Chimborazo, as an example of a purpose-built observation station constructed during the early twentieth century by the United States Weather Bureau, has significance under Criterion A in the area of Science and under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The well-preserved earthworks within the District are highly important examples of Civil War field fortifications that are significant under Criterion C in the area of Engineering. The Garthright House, Watt House, and Shelton House are significant under Criterion C for their representative eighteenth- and nineteenth-century architecture. Under Criterion D, the District possesses significance in the area of Archeology: Historic, Non-Aboriginal for the data it has yielded, and has the potential to yield, about the military and medical experiences of the Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War. The District also possesses significance for its demonstrated and potential ability to provide information about the evolution of the agrarian economy and landscape in antebellum Piedmont Virginia and the enslaved and free black people who lived on it. Lastly, the District's contributing commemorative monuments meet Criteria Consideration F because they possess significance engendered from their age, design, and symbolic values. (NR 2018: Sec.8: 43)

The period of significance for the District extends from ca. 1720, the earliest date associated with a standing historic resource within the District, to 1944, the end of the initial national park development period. The primary period of significance for the District corresponds to the years between the construction of the Richmond defensive fortifications in 1861 and the conclusion of the Richmond-Petersburg Campaign in 1865. The period of significance for commemorative activities associated with the District begins in 1866, almost immediately after the Civil War ended, and extends through 1944 to encompass the initial development of the battlefield lands as a national park under the NPS. After 1944, austerity measures throughout the National Park System curtailed development at the park for several decades, and the System-wide Mission 66 initiative of the 1950s and 1960s had little impact at Richmond. Additional land acquisition and resource rehabilitation has occurred only within the last two decades, i.e. the late–1990s to the present (2015). The period of significance for historic archeology under Criterion D is ca. 1725–1864. (NR 2018: Sec.8: 43)

Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains:
Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield, part of the Richmond National Battlefield Park Historic District, possesses national-level significance under Criterion A in the areas of Military and Commemoration, Criterion C in the area of Engineering, and Criterion D in the area of Archeology-Historic (Non-Aboriginal). The property also possesses state-level significance under Criterion A in the areas of Agriculture and Architecture. The Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield property also meets Criteria Consideration F: Commemorative Properties, for its commemorative monuments.

The overall period of significance for the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield is 1725 to 1932, beginning with construction of the Shelton House and commencement of agricultural activities, and ending when the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities placed a commemorative plaque on the north property boundary. Within the overall period of significance are four distinct time periods related to the various areas of significance. The period for military significance is 1862-1864, when the property was first impacted by military activity to the end of the Overland Campaign. The period for commemorative significance is 1925-1932, beginning when the Battlefield Markers Association installed Freeman Marker #51 and ending when the APVA installed their marker. The period for engineering significance is 1864, the year the Federal earthworks were built. The period for agricultural significance is 1725-1927, when the primary production of Rural Plains transitioned from food crops to ornamental vegetation for the nursery operation. The period for architecture significance of the Shelton House is 1725-1864, as established in the 2012 Historic Structure Report.

The significance of Rural Plains as a nursery operation, its association with local themes of landscape architecture, ornamental plant cultivation, and economics, and its potential association with important landscape architects Arthur Shurcliff and Charles Gillette have yet to be fully assessed at this time. Such an assessment in the future may justify extension of the period of significance beyond 1932.

CRITERION A
Military History:
Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is nationally significant under Criterion A in the area of Military History as the site of the May 29-31, 1864, Battle of Totopotomoy Creek and its June 1 aftermath, which occurred as part of Union Lt. General Ulysses S. Grant's Overland Campaign. When considered in conjunction with the May 30, 1864, Battle of Bethesda Church, the battle resulted in casualty figures of over 1,000 Confederate soldiers and 730 Union soldiers. The events of late May 1864 illustrated that Confederate forces remained prepared to fight and dedicated to the protection of Richmond. The Battle of Totopotomoy Creek was a prelude to the Confederate flank attack at Bethesda Church on May 30 and the ultimate end of the campaign at the Battle of Cold Harbor the following week. Through these, the final stages of the Overland Campaign, Grant's Union forces were repeatedly unable to break the opposing Confederate defenses. The failure of the Overland Campaign proved a harbinger of the ten-month-long Richmond-Petersburg Campaign to follow.

The 124-acre Totopotomoy Creek Unit represents only a small portion of the sprawling 2,800-acre core area defined for the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield by the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission. However, the property contains the site of the Union headquarters and signal station, lines of Union earthworks and associated artillery and infantry positions and picket lines, views toward the locations of the opposing Confederate line of earthworks, and combat and engagement areas associated with the battle.

Surviving resources that contribute to the battle-era significance of battlefield landscape include a number of landscape features that define the setting. Several surviving segments of defensive earthworks constructed by Union forces; the Shelton House, used as a signal station during the battle; the property's landform and topography; remnants of historic fields and forested areas; and watercourses, including Totopotomoy Creek, all contributed to the physical environment present at the time of the battle. The continued presence of these features provides a tangible connection to the experiences of those who fought in the area and offers visitors a visual representation of how certain portions of the property may have appeared during the 1864 battle.

Commemoration:
Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield is nationally significant under Criterion A in the area of Commemoration for its associations with the Civil War battlefield memorialization and preservation movement. The 1862 and 1864 Civil War battlefield sites surrounding Richmond did not benefit initially from federal battlefield preservation efforts in the 1890s that resulted in the creation of the country's first four national military parks, all at Civil War sites, under the management of the War Department. Over the next few decades, numerous individuals and groups petitioned Congress for additional parks and memorials at other deserving American battlefields. In the 1920s, Richmond journalist and historian Douglas Southall Freeman led a group of interested residents in forming the Battlefield Markers Association to raise money for the identification and erection of over 60 commemorative markers at various battlefield sites in and

around the city. The collection of so-called “Freeman Markers”—13 of which are located within Richmond NBP—is the earliest known series of non-governmental historical markers in the country.

In 1925 a Freeman Marker #51 was installed on the north side of Rural Plains, commemorating the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek, and marking the line of the Union position. A corresponding marker, #50, was placed on the west side of Totopotomoy Creek marking the Confederate line. Freeman Marker #51 was originally installed on the shoulder of Studley Road, intended to be read through the window of a car. When Studley Road was realigned in 1962, the road shifted north and a turnout was created to provide access to the marker. The turnout no longer exists, but the marker remains.

In 1932, a commemorative marker was placed at Rural Plains by the Hanover Chapter of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. Organized in 1889, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) was the nation’s first statewide historic preservation organization. Spearheaded by an elite mix of female antiquarians and their “gentlemen advisers,” the APVA became a sanctioned instrument of conservatives who strove to counter social and political changes after the American Civil War (1861–1865) by emphasizing southern history and tradition. The APVA enshrined old buildings, graveyards, and historical sites and exhibited them as symbols of Virginia’s identity. The APVA sign at Rural Plains consists of a cast iron sign on a post.

Agriculture:
Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is significant at the state level under Criterion A in the area of Agriculture for its representation of a continuum of Virginia plantation life and settlement that spans the eighteenth century through the early twentieth century. Occupation of the Rural Plains landscape by the Shelton family began at least as early as 1724-1726, when the extant dwelling appears to have been constructed, although archeological investigation and property records place John Shelton at Totopotomoy Creek as early as 1719, and within St. Paul’s Parish as early as 1704.

Important state themes represented by the property include eighteenth-century westward expansion of European settlement, the establishment and long-term development of a western Tidewater farm and plantation, the introduction of tobacco monoculture, the nineteenth century transition to and expansion of diversified crops, and the development of transportation routes, both water and land, leading to shipping centers such as Hanovertown and Newburn. Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains embodies these components of Virginia history through the surviving resources present on the property, which include the landform and natural systems; Shelton House and corn crib; circulation features such as Pear Lane, Studley Road, and farm lanes edging fields; continued agricultural use of the land; and hedgerows, berms, and ditches that define the edges of agricultural fields.

Although open areas being actively cultivated through agricultural leases represent only a portion of the area that was farmed historically, the continuation of traditional land use within Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains provides a physical connection to the more extensive farming operations that were commonplace in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Tree lines and wooded areas within the property boundaries have significantly increased in prominence, obscuring historical viewsheds and visually isolating the agricultural areas from each other and from the Shelton House.

CRITERION C
Architecture:
Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield is significant at the state level under Criterion C in the area of Architecture for the Shelton House, an important example of early Georgian architecture in middle Virginia. The gambrel-roofed building constructed with bricks laid in a Flemish bond with glazed headers demonstrates the rising stature of Hanover County gentry in the early eighteenth century. Typical Georgian elements employed on the
Shelton House include a dentiled cornice, rubbed brick lintels over the first-story windows and segmental arches over the basement windows, and a four-light transom over the center entrance. The center-passage house has front-to-back symmetry, another typical feature of Georgian construction, and paired end chimneys. Although gambrel-roofed Georgian houses are rare in Virginia and other parts of the South today, scholars believe they may have been built relatively often. Later alterations to the Shelton House include the enlargement of the first-story and dormer windows and the alteration or replacement of original entry porches on the east and west elevations to include Greek Revival elements. The house originally

belonged to a large plantation covering about 900 acres. (NR 2018, Sec.8: 107)

Engineering:
Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield is nationally significant under Criterion C in the area of Engineering for its remaining military fortifications. The permanent earthworks that ringed the city were part of the most extensive network of fortifications constructed during the Civil War. The sophisticated systems of trenches and forts constructed by the Confederate and Union armies represent the state to which field fortification engineering advanced during the Civil War and are generally regarded as the forerunners of the static trench warfare methods used in Europe in World War I. In addition to the permanent fortifications, numerous examples of temporary field fortifications are located on the battlefield units within the District. These field fortifications are representative of the military tactic of an active defense espoused most prominently by West Point engineering professor and military tactics author Dennis Hart Mahan (1802–1871). They were hastily established lines of defense scouted and selected by military engineers based on the natural advantages a position offered. The fortifications themselves were dug or otherwise constructed by the troops as they arrived at the select position. In places like Cold Harbor where the armies faced one another for relatively long periods of time, the field fortifications evolved into elaborate systems. (NR 2018, Sec.8: 97)

Prior to the May 28–30, 1864, Battle of Totopotomoy Creek / Bethesda Church, Lt. Gen Grant learned that Gen. Lee had his men entrenched on the south side of Totopotomoy Creek, lying in wait for Grant's men. Gen. Winfield Hancock's Second Corps, First Division, constructed earthworks on the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield parallel to the creek under the direction of Gen. Francis Barlow. The Federal Earthworks at Totopotomoy Creek consisted of artillery platforms connected by rifle pits and reinforced with wood from fences on the property. (NR 2018, Sec.8: 107)

CRITERION D
Archeology – Historic (Non-Aboriginal):
Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield is nationally significant under Criterion D in the area of Archeology – Historic (Non-Aboriginal) for its surviving earthworks and the potential to investigate the evolution of nineteenth-century military engineering, design techniques, and technology over the course of the war. The construction and elaboration of field fortifications is the most visible relic of the Civil War on the extant landscape, and perhaps one of the most important contributions that the war made to the field of military engineering. Championed by Confederate General James Longstreet and adopted by both armies as the war dragged on, these fortifications created a durable "defensive" military landscape. The earthworks at Totopotomoy Creek, as well as Chickahominy Bluff, Cold Harbor, Drewry's Bluff, Fort Harrison, and Parker's Battery, provide particularly valuable resources for examining those issues as they were variably constructed at the beginning and near the end of the war. In many cases, the earthworks were captured by the opposing army, which then reconfigured them to meet specific offensive or defensive needs. (NR 2018, Sec. 7: 109)

Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield is also nationally significant under Criterion D in the area of Archeology – Historic (Non-Aboriginal) for its potential to yield important information about the antebellum development of the landscape and the enslaved and free people who lived on it. The 1862 Peninsula Campaign and 1864 Overland Campaign were fought across a preexisting cultural landscape of farms and fields shaped by the Virginia Piedmont agricultural land uses. The Rural Plains Complex Site was witness at varying times and to varying degrees in the antebellum slaveholding economy from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. The archeological exploration of changes to these plantation and farm landscapes, including changes in architecture and activity patterns, may provide insights on the processes of economic development, shifting agricultural patterns, and changing ideas about class, race, and social relations before, during, and after the Civil War. (NR 2018, Sec.8: 108,117)

National Register Significance Criteria:

Significance Criterion A - Associated with events significant to broad patterns of our history

Significance Criterion D - Has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important to prehistory or history

Significance Criterion C - Embodies distinctive construction, work of master, or high artistic values

National Register Criteria Consideration:

Consideration F -- A commemorative property

National Register Periods of Significance (with Historic Context Themes):

Time Period: CE 1862 - CE 1864

Historic Context Theme	Subtheme	Facet	Other Facet
Shaping the Political Landscape	The Civil War	Battles In The North And South	

Time Period: CE 1925 - CE 1932

Historic Context Theme	Subtheme	Facet	Other Facet
Expressing Cultural Values	Other Expressing Cultural Values	Other Expressing Cultural Values	Commemoration

Time Period: CE 1724 - CE 1927

Historic Context Theme	Subtheme	Facet	Other Facet
Developing the American Economy	Agriculture	Plantation Agriculture	

Time Period: CE 1725 - CE 1864

Historic Context Theme	Subtheme	Facet	Other Facet
Expressing Cultural Values	Architecture	Georgian (1730-1780)	

National Register Area of Significance:

Area of Significance Category: Agriculture

Area of Significance Subcategory:

Narrative:

Area of Significance Category: Architecture

Area of Significance Subcategory:

Narrative:

Area of Significance Category: Archeology

Area of Significance Subcategory: Historic-Non-Aboriginal

Narrative:

Area of Significance Category: Engineering

Area of Significance Subcategory:

Narrative:

Area of Significance Category: Military

Area of Significance Subcategory:

Narrative:

Area of Significance Category: Other

Area of Significance Subcategory:

Narrative: Commemoration

NRIS Information:

NRIS Name:	Richmond National Battlefield Park
NRIS ID:	66000836
Primary Certification Date:	04/27/2018

State Register Documentation:

Identification Number:	042-0029
Name:	Rural Plains
Listed Date:	03/18/1975

National Historic Landmarks:

National Historic Landmark? No

Theme:

Contributing:

NHL ID:

NHL URL:

Date:

Statement of Significance for National Historic Landmark:

World Heritage Site:

World Heritage Site? No

Category:

WHS ID:

WHS URL:

Date:

Is Resource within a designated National Natural Landscape: No

Chronology and Physical History

Chronology:

Year	Event	Major Event Narrative
BCE 5000 - 1600	Inhabited	Pre-contact settlement of eastern Virginia consists of three discrete periods during which American Indian settlement patterns varied: Paleoindian, Archaic, and Woodland periods. Indian tribes known to have lived in the area during the contact period (1600s) were predominantly represented by Algonquian-speaking groups located throughout the Maryland and Virginia Tidewater, stretching as far south as Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds in eastern North Carolina and as far north as the Potomac Rive
CE 1607	Explored	Early contact between English settlers and the Native population began in 1607 with the English arrival and settlement at Jamestown.
CE 1612	Farmed/Harvested	John Rolfe develops a marketable strain of tobacco
CE 1620 - 1629	Settled	Inland migration of the English colonists began in the late 1620s as settlers established farms, and eventually settlements, further upstream along both the James and York Rivers
CE 1656	Memorialized	Located within Pamunkey traditional territory, sometime after 1656, the creek in the future Totopotomoy Creek Unit is named for a paramount chief of the same name who was killed during the Battle of Bloody Run in 1656.
CE 1704	Settled	John Shelton first appears in the church records for St. Paul`s Parish in Hanover County in October 1705 as “reader 12 months,” placing him in the area as early as late 1704.
CE 1720	Established	Hanover County is established in 1720 from the western portion of New Kent County. The eastern portion of the county, which includes the present-day Totopotomoy Creek Unit, is on the edge of this frontier throughout the seventeenth early eighteenth century.
CE 1724 - 1726	Built	Dendrochronological analysis of the timbers in the Shelton House indicate that the structure was constructed between 1724 and 1726.
CE 1725	Land Transfer	John Shelton dies in estate in 1725. His estate is administered by his widow Elizabeth and her new husband Thomas Prosser.
CE 1725 - 1751	Farmed/Harvested	Thomas Prosser develops and farms Rural Plains until his death sometime before 1751.
CE 1759	Land Transfer	Elizabeth Prosser dies in 1759, and Rural Plains is inherited by John Shelton II.
CE 1759 - 1769	Farmed/Harvested	John Shelton II operates Rural Plains, although there is no evidence that he lived there as a primary residence.
CE 1769	Land Transfer	Upon John Shelton II’s death, Rural Plains is passed to his brother, Joseph Shelton.
CE 1769 - 1784	Farmed/Harvested	Joseph Shelton operates Rural Plains, and while he maintains a home house in Louisa County, it appears that he lives at Rural Plains at least part time.

Year	Event	Major Event Narrative
CE 1784	Land Transfer	Joseph Shelton dies and leaves Rural Plains to his nephew, John Shelton III.
CE 1786 - 1798	Inhabited	John Shelton III appears to have moved from another of his plantations to Rural Plains as his primary residence as early as 1786.
CE 1798	Land Transfer	John Shelton III dies and leaves Rural Plains as a life estate to his wife Ann.
CE 1798 - 1833	Inhabited	Ann Shelton and her new husband Peter Foster operate Rural Plains together for more than 30 years, raising Ann and John Shelton's children in the house.
CE 1835 - 1850	Established	Edwin Shelton establishes a school for girls at Rural Plains, enrolling approximately 10 girls and young women. The school is no longer in operation by 1850.
CE 1835	Built	Two new buildings are built at Rural Plains, possibly for the operation of the girls' school.
CE 1840	Land Transfer	Rural Plains is transferred from John Shelton III's estate to Edwin Shelton.
CE 1840 - 1865	Farmed/Harvested	Edwin expands the operation of Rural Plains, growing wheat, corn, oats, tobacco, beans, peas, potatoes, and fruit, and producing butter, hay, and wool.
CE 1864	Military Operation	The Civil War Battle of Totopotomoy Creek is fought on the fields of Rural Plains.
CE 1864	Excavated	Earthworks are built at Rural Plains, extending from northwest to southeast across the property. A line of artillery epaulements is built just to the rear of the Shelton House.
CE 1864	Military Operation	Shelton House is used as a signal station, and two signal officers are stationed on the roof during the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek.
CE 1864	Damaged	The Shelton House is hit with approximately 50 shells and mortars, severely damaging the house.
CE 1864	Damaged	The landscape of Rural Plains, as well as the farm operation, are severely damaged by the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek, both from exploding ammunition and from the activity of the Union Soldiers as they erected defensive earthworks.
CE 1864 - 1874	Maintained	Edwin Shelton makes repairs to the house and farm, and transitions the farm to a wage-labor operation.
CE 1874	Land Transfer	Edwin Shelton dies and leaves Rural Plains as a life estate to his widow. Edwin's will in 1874 indicates that at least some of the former slave quarters are still standing at that time. Sarah does not remarry, and the farm was managed during this period by her son, Walter M. Shelton.
CE 1887	Land Transfer	After 13 years of managing Rural Plains as part of his father's estate, Walter M. Shelton acquires the property upon his mother's death in 1887.
CE 1903	Land Transfer	Walter M. Shelton defaults on a loan from 1886 and Rural Plains is sold at auction to Walter's son William R. Shelton.

Year	Event	Major Event Narrative
CE 1903 - 1927	Farmed/Harvested	William R. Shelton operates a truck farm at Rural Plains, growing watermelon and cantaloupe that were shipped to markets in Richmond and elsewhere.
CE 1925	Memorialized	The Battle of Totopotomoy Creek is commemorated with a Battlefield Markers Association marker, or Freeman marker.
CE 1927	Farmed/Harvested	William Shelton starts Rural Plains Nursery, specializing in boxwoods and growing a wide variety of ornamental trees and shrubs for sale. Many of the former crop fields are converted to the production of nursery stock.
CE 1927 - 1960	Naturalized	Due to reduction of crop production, several agricultural fields are allowed to revert to forest.
CE 1932	Memorialized	The Hanover Branch of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities places a roadside historical sign on the property.
CE 1958	Land Transfer	William R. Shelton dies and leaves Rural Plains and the Rural Plains Nursery business to his two children Mary Winn Shelton and William R. (Bill) Shelton Jr.
CE 1976	Established	The Shelton House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
CE 1990 - 2001	Developed	The land to the east of Rural Plains is developed into small-lot residential neighborhoods between 1990 and 2001, including the Shelton Pointe neighborhood on the land adjoining the Rural Plains property.
CE 2000	Land Transfer	William R. Shelton Jr. conveys Rural Plains to the Totopotomoy Battlefield at Rural Plains Foundation for $1.2 million.
CE 2005	Land Transfer	The Totopotomoy Battlefield at Rural Plains Foundation conveys Rural Plains to the United States of America, subject to lifetime use by Bill Shelton.
CE 2006	Established	Rural Plains is added as a new unit to the Richmond National Battlefield Park in June 2006, just a month after Bill Shelton’s death.
CE 2006	Preserved	Selected furnishings within the Shelton House are purchased from the estate of Bill Shelton and removed for conservation work.
CE 2007 - 2008	Stabilized	Initial stabilization work is carried out in 2007 and 2008. Repairs are made to the interior brick walls of the cellar, cellar fireplace, exterior brick walls, window openings, and north chimney, among other work.
CE 2009 - 2010	Built	A meandering section of trail (0.1 mile) is installed to connect the existing trail to a section of earthworks in the woods. A wooden bridge is added across a waterway, creating a loop for the existing trail. (PEPC #27670, 31999)
CE 2011	Built	A small parking lot is constructed in order to provide vehicle access to the site for the general public. (PEPC #25840)

Year	Event	Major Event Narrative
CE 2013 - 2017	Rehabilitated	Several projects to restore the exterior of the Shelton House to its 1864 appearance occur. Projects include removal of the 20th century porch, restoration of the 19th century porch (including the addition of wheelchair entry capability), repair of exterior masonry and wooden architectural elements, and replacement of the metal roof with a wooden shake roof. (PEPC #68914)
CE 2015 - 2016	Removed	Approximately 6 acres of invasive vegetation is removed. (PEPC #60877)
CE 2016	Removed	Witness elm tree on east side of house is struck by lightning a second time (the first strike occurring c. 2011) and is subsequently taken down.
CE 2018	Built	A crushed oyster shell path is established to approach the east side of the Shelton House. The path extends from a wayside at the yard's edge directly to the east porch. (PEPC #82097)
CE 2019 - 2020	Removed	The park removes 20th century vegetation at Rural Plains, including 2 large boxwood hedges and approximately 4 acres of tree and brush removal. (PEPC #74910) The metal bell mounted on a wooden pole (non-contributing – compatible) near the Shelton House is removed.
CE 2020	Planted	Park plants a row of pine trees along western border to begin to block houses from trail. Will also allow native forest to grow up on the park side of the pine trees.
CE 2022	Altered	The southern loop drive immediately south of the Shelton House is removed. A portion of the drive is converted to a walking path to be used in conjunction with preparing an accessible route to the house. (PEPC #112127)
CE 2024	Excavated	The park contracts an archeological survey to locate unmarked graves associated with enslaved people at Rural Plains. Project uses archeological human remains detection dogs (AHRDD) and targeted geophysical survey to conduct non-invasive investigations. (PMIS 315118)
CE 2026	Built	A birdhouse is erected southeast of the house. (PEPC 132442)

Physical History:

INTRODUCTION

The following section provides information on the physical development and evolution of the site, organized by time periods. The physical history of Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains was adapted from the historical narrative developed by Dutton and Associates for the "Cultural Landscape Report, Part I, Totopotomoy Creek Unit, Richmond National Battlefield Park." Edits have been made to conform the CLR history chapter to the CLI format and for length and consistency. Sources are as cited in the original document.

PRE-CONTACT-to 1607

Pre-contact settlement of eastern Virginia consisted of three discrete periods during which American Indian settlement patterns varied depending on environmental contexts. These periods are traditionally divided into the Paleoindian, Archaic, and Woodland periods, each of which displayed varying population levels and distribution throughout the Tidewater region. As environmental conditions improved throughout the region and population levels increased correspondingly, inhabitants faced unique and changing pressures resulting from evolving resource availability and cultural adaptation. Settlement patterns transitioned from diverse ecozone locations (particularly near the Atlantic coastline) during the Paleoinidian period, to interior upland and wetland locations during the Archaic period, to locations along fertile inland flood plains associated with major rivers during the Woodland period. These developments reflected the increase in population and efforts to maximize resource utilization throughout the various periods.

Settlement patterns in Virginia during the Paleoindian period (c.11000 BCE to c.8000 BCE) directly correlated with the environmental conditions presented during the end of the Pleistocene epoch. The Laurentide ice sheet covered much of northern North America during this time, depressing temperatures in the region and leading to a boreal forest dominated by jack pine and spruce. It is likely that Paleoindian populations maintained seasonal base camps located either in diverse ecozones where flora and fauna were easily procured, or near lithic sources that contained the cryptocrystalline stone, a statistically favored material for creating projectile points and other lithic tools such as gravers, adzes, and scrapers. Wider ranging satellite camps would have been seasonally occupied to exploit other natural resources, be they lithic material, flora, or fauna. Due to the location of the Totopotomoy Creek Unit far from the coast or any diverse ecological area such as a major river, it is unlikely for there to be evidence of Paleoindian activity near the property, and no such sites have been identified to date. (Pielou 1991: 108; Anderson and Sassaman 1996: 5,7)

During the Archaic period (c.8000 BCE to c.1200 BCE), populations in the Virginia area began to alter their settlement patterns as a result of the retreat of the Laurentide ice sheet at the end of the Pleistocene epoch and the beginning of the Holocene epoch. As sea levels rose (resulting in the gradual formation of the Chesapeake Bay estuary), native peoples spread inland along major rivers and within rich environmental areas associated with the Fall Line separating the Tidewater and Piedmont regions of Virginia. Likely organized into band-level social groups, the range of movement for these early inhabitants would have occurred over relatively large regions. Utilizing larger base camps located near sources of lithic material during a portion of the year, smaller micro-bands of a few single families would have dispersed to smaller satellite camps in order to take advantage of seasonally available resources located within upland terraces and resource-rich wetland areas. The Totopotomoy Creek Unit's location near the Fall Line and along Totopotomoy Creek itself indicates a possibility of Archaic period activity within the boundaries of the property. Two pre-contact archeological sites have been identified within the boundaries of the Park Unit, and although they have not been temporally categorized, artifact assemblage recovered from these sites reveals the possibility of Archaic period occupation. (Anderson and Sassaman 1996: 24-25)

The Woodland period (c.1200 BCE to c.CE 1600) is traditionally differentiated from the Archaic period by the development of a ceramic technology, as well as a greater reliance on horticulture and agriculture crops such as beans, corn, and squash, which evoked increased sedentism and the nucleating of societies. Populations during this time began to consolidate into villages near rivers and floodplains with fertile soil, favorable terrain, and access to fauna, where communities would clear areas for agricultural development with "slash and burn" techniques. These larger base camps were serviced by smaller resource extraction sites. (Anderson and Mainfort 2002: 1-2; Dent 1995: 231)

Located along the Totopotomoy Creek drainage, the Totopotomoy Creek Unit exhibits potential for Woodland period activity associated with small-scale procurement camps utilized in context of a seasonal subsistence pattern. However, no Woodland period sites have been identified on the property to date.

EARLY CONTACT AND SETTLEMENT OF REGION, 1607-1724

Indian tribes known to have lived in the area during the contact period were predominantly represented by Algonquian-speaking groups located throughout the Maryland and Virginia Tidewater, stretching as far south as Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds in eastern North Carolina and as far north as the Potomac River. Most of the groups were under the political influence of the Powhatan chiefdom centered on the James and York River watersheds. Although himself a Pamunkey Indian, Powhatan's political influence extended over all Algonquian speaking tribes in the Tidewater Virginia area. The Chickahominy tribe was an exception to Powhatan's governance, living within the boundaries of the Powhatan influence but maintaining an independent governing body. These tribes, along with the Patowomecke Indians to the north, would prove instrumental to the survival of the English settlement during the early years of its establishment. (Waselkov et.al. 2006: 215-216,218)

Early contact between English settlers and the Native population began in 1607 with the English arrival and settlement at Jamestown. Initial interactions between the two groups primarily consisted of the trade of English goods for Indian maize. Powhatan soon turned his attention to his desire to trade for firearms, and although prior interactions had remained relatively peaceable to this point, the English had no interest in accommodating such a request. The resulting tension, combined with a severe drought that constrained supplies of food and water for the Virginia Indians and colonists alike, resulted in the rapid spread of increasingly violent encounters between the Indians and the English. (Waselkov et.al. 2006: 219,221)

Inland migration of the English colonists began in the late 1620s as settlers established farms, and eventually settlements, further upstream along both the James and York Rivers. Although Williamsburg remained the only significant population center through the end of the seventeenth century, smaller settlements were situated throughout the Tidewater region of the colony. (Kulikoff 1986: 30)

Key to the burgeoning economic success of the settlement at Jamestown was the development of a marketable tobacco strain by John Rolfe in 1612. Met with high demand in both England and mainland Europe, this provided an economically viable product and generated renewed interest in the overall development of Virginia colonization. As demand for tobacco increased, greater numbers of settlers made the voyage to the New World in search of economic success. Initially, many of these were brought over as indentured servants to work on land owned by others under the headright system. Landowners in the mid-Atlantic region remained dependent primarily on white indentured servitude throughout much of the seventeenth century, with immigration levels remaining relatively high until the very end of the 1600s. (Dunn 1984: 159-160)

Servant immigration levels dropped off significantly by the end of the seventeenth century as tobacco prices fell and planters were unable to entice servants with the promise of economic success. Additionally, because of a combination of a greater number of landowners throughout the colonies and an increase in land planted in tobacco to make up for lower prices, what labor was available to planters was not sufficient to meet the demand of increased levels of production. To make up this labor shortfall, planters increasingly turned to black slaves imported from Africa. (Kulikoff 1986: 39,41)

By the turn of the eighteenth century, the depressed tobacco prices required landowners to produce ever increasing amounts of the crop in order to turn a profit. Intensive cultivation rapidly depleted soils, driving planters to seek yet more land. But as the eighteenth century progressed and settlement in the area increased, land became more constrained. Growers increasingly experimented with crop rotation and soil amendments to rehabilitate depleted soils, allowing fields to go fallow until nutrients had been replenished. Yet, continued pressure for fresh land, combined with an increasing population and a greater number of freedmen, fueled westward expansion of the colonial frontier. Following major waterways such as the James, York, Rappahannock, and Potomac rivers, colonists slowly pushed into the interior of Virginia's Tidewater region. (Kulikoff 1986: 47; Lemon 1984: 103)

Hanover County was established in 1720 from the western portion of New Kent County in response to the increased population in the area. The eastern portion of the county, which included the present-day Totopotomoy Creek Unit, was on the edge of this frontier throughout the seventeenth early eighteenth century. Hanovertown, originally known as Page's Warehouse, was established in 1676 on the Pamunkey River as the first major Colonial settlement inside county lines. (Kulikoff 1986: 95)

The early history of the Shelton family in Virginia is poorly documented. Little archival evidence from the seventeenth century has been located, and oral histories of the property as passed down through the family are frequently unsubstantiated. Shelton family tradition suggests that the family received land holdings originally consisting of 5,000 acres, which was presented to John Shelton of England (descendant of Sir Ralph Shelton) by a "Royal" grant at some point in the seventeenth century, and that a dwelling was constructed between dates ranging from 1664 to 1680. Research into the title chain of the property has not yielded clear evidence of either of these claims, and the construction date of the current house proposed by traditional sources has in fact been contradicted by dendrochronological research, indicating a construction date of c.1724-1726. (Chronology of Property Ownership, Rural Plains, Hanover County, Virginia, hereafter Rural Plains Chronology)

The first verifiable evidence of the Shelton family residing in the Hanover County area appeared in 1705, when the name John Shelton appears in an entry in the Vestry Book of St. Paul's Parish, New Kent County (of which Hanover County was a part until 1720). The entry notes payment to John Shelton for "reading 12 months," placing him in the area no later than late 1704. The first specific mention of property owned by the Shelton family did not appear until 1719, when reference was made of property belonging to John Shelton abutting a land grant of 1,120 acres on the north side of Totopotomoy Creek made to George and John Wilkinson. These records do not indicate how much land was owned by the Sheltons at this time, nor do they state where exactly it was situated; however, the entries do provide indication that the Shelton family had established itself as landowners in the area by this time. (Rural Plains Chronology).

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SHELTON FAMILY IN HANOVER COUNTY, 1724-1800

Despite steady growth of Hanover County, the area was considered to be part of the frontier through the 1730s, with less than half of its land patented and taxed. By the time the dwelling at Rural Plains was built, the Shelton family was likely among a relatively small number of settlers in the area. As with the more settled areas to the east, this portion of Hanover County would have been planted in tobacco during this time, with additional resources dedicated to the cultivation of food crops such as corn and smaller subsistence endeavors including kitchen gardens, farm orchards, and limited amounts of livestock. The excess produce from these crops would have been transported to markets along rolling roads and cart paths or by flat-bottomed boats along smaller streams to be loaded onto ships at ports located on major waterways. (Kulikoff 1986: 94-95)

By the 1720s, John Shelton was established in Hanover County and an active member of St. Paul's Parish. He and his wife Elizabeth had six sons and three daughters, all under the age of 21. John Shelton died intestate in 1725. John's widow, Elizabeth Shelton, had married Hanover attorney Thomas Prosser by 1728, who served as guardian of two of her five sons, Joseph and William. Processioning records for St. Paul's Parish list Thomas Prosser as the property owner in 1731, 1739, and 1743, and "Widow" Prosser in 1751 . Elizabeth Prosser may have died sometime before 1759, as her name is replaced by that of her eldest son, John Shelton II, in the processioning for that year. (Yocum 2012: 19)

John Shelton II was released from his guardianship in 1734, presumably when he turned 21 years old. About this time, he married Eleanor Parks, the daughter of successful printer William Parks of Williamsburg. Fragmentary evidence suggests that John and Eleanor lived at one of her father's properties in Hanover Courthouse from the 1730s through the 1750s, and after that at "the Forks of Hanover," a property on the Pamunkey River north of the Totopotomoy Creek property. No primary evidence suggests John Shelton II lived at Totopotomoy Creek.

It was during this time that Patrick Henry was married to John Shelton II's daughter Sarah. Patrick Henry, who would become a significant orator in association with the American Revolutionary War, was born in Hanover County and had grown up within the same social circle as the Shelton family. Oral tradition holds that the wedding ceremony of 16 year old Sarah Shelton to Patrick Henry took place in the front parlor of the Shelton House in 1754, although the location of the wedding cannot be independently verified. The fact that Patrick Henry and Sarah Shelton were married and lived in Hanover County during this period is not in question, however. As a wedding gift, John Shelton II gave the newlyweds property connected to his own in Hanover County, as well as several slaves to work it. While the identity of this property is not clearly documented, it is possible that John Shelton gave them Pine Slash, a small farm located to the southeast of the Totopotomoy Creek Unit. There the couple unsuccessfully farmed the land until the destruction of the house by fire in 1757, at which point they spent a brief year in the nearby overseer's cottage (which is extant) before moving to the tavern at Hanover Court House owned by Sarah's father. (Rural Plains Chronology)

John Shelton II owned the Totopotomoy Creek property from his mother's death in 1759 until his own in 1769. Although John had two sons, one of which was in his twenties, the property was transferred to John's brother Joseph after his death. Notes from Patrick Henry indicate that John Shelton II had financial troubles late in life, and Joseph, a successful planter, may have purchased the property to relieve some of John's debts. Joseph owned several properties and is generally described as being "of Louisa County," so it is not known how long he lived at Totopotomoy Creek after growing up there. In 1777 an advertisement that Joseph placed in the "Virginia Gazette" for the sale of the property states that "The terms may be known by applying to the subscriber, on the premises," suggesting that he was living there at least temporarily. Joseph's will written in 1780, however, refers to his "home house" in Louisa County. The advertisement did not result in the sale of the property, which was owned by Joseph until his death in 1784.

Upon Joseph Shelton's death in 1784, the Totopotomoy Creek property was inherited by his nephew John Shelton III. John was already established at another plantation St. Martin's Parish in Hanover County at that time, but by 1786, tax records describe the St. Martin's property as having no free

adult males in residence, suggesting that John and his family had relocated to Totopotomoy Creek. John Shelton III died October 31, 1798, at the age of about 48, leaving a widow and six minor children.

Development of Rural Plains:
Although Shelton family tradition and a handful of anecdotal sources contend that the Shelton House was built in the late seventeenth century, dendrochronological analysis of the timbers in the attic and cellar of the house date to between 1724 and 1726. The existing house may have replaced an earlier structure, but direct evidence of such a structure has not been identified. John Shelton I had been established in the area for a number of years by this time, but it is not known where he and his sizable family lived. John Shelton I died in 1725, leaving his wife Elizabeth and nine minor children. By 1728, Elizabeth had remarried to Thomas Prosser, and the two assumed joint administration of John Shelton's estate. The timing of Shelton's death and the construction date of the house of 1724-1726 make it difficult to know who built the house. It may have been started by Shelton and finished by Prosser, or it may have been constructed entirely after Prosser's marriage to Elizabeth. A combination of skilled craftsmen, indentured laborers, and [enslaved laborers] were no doubt involved in the design, manufacture of materials, and assembly of the house. (Yocum 2012: 15,70; Review comment, L. Lowe, 28 July 2025)

While most large-scale planters seated themselves along important water routes, less prosperous planters found themselves in areas set further back from convenient routes. The houses constructed by these individuals tended to be frame structures with unfinished wood siding, and most featured clay-lined wooden chimneys and wooden shutters over unglazed windows. Despite being located on what was at the time considered the Virginia frontier, the brick construction and glazed windows of the Shelton House indicated a greater level of prosperity. It is uncommon that a house of such generous proportion and durable construction as the Shelton House would have been located at any significant distance from a major transportation route. As Rhys Isaac states, "Great men took up strategically sited land along the river fronts," while "the dwellings of the humbler yeomen and tenants tended to be removed from the main waterways, so that the great majority of the total population lived amid fields and trees along the lesser creeks." (Isaac 1982: 32-33)

Isaac goes on to describe the presence of a "profusion of separate structures around…these countryseats," which could likely have been present around the Shelton House during this time, although current archeological research has not yet positively identified any such features. Additional features which were frequently present on the property of plantations similar in both geographic location and temporal designation included structured landscaping such as extensive formal gardens, terraces, and long driveways (examples include Shirley and Berkeley Plantations, both located along the James River). Although evidence of such landscaping from the eighteenth century at Rural Plains has yet to be discovered, future research may yield insights into these areas. (Isaac 1982: 35; Vlach 1993: 5)

Additional information about the Shelton plantation on Totopotomoy Creek may be inferred by looking at comparable properties in the area during the period. Camille Well's 1993 article "The Planter's Prospect: Houses, Outbuildings, and Rural Landscapes in Eighteenth Century Virginia" tabulates descriptions of properties advertised for sale in the Virginia Gazette from 1736 to 1780, including the primary dwellings, outbuildings, and landscape features associated with each property. Echoing William Hugh's observations while travelling through Virginia in 1732, Wells' research supports the image of prosperous agricultural estates featuring a variety of outbuildings serving specific roles. One house comparable to the Shelton House and described as having belonged to an "exceptionally affluent planter," featured a detached kitchen, store, warehouse, meat house, dairy, coach house, stable, cow house, quarter, overseer's house, and two corn houses, all situated on 1,200 acres in Richmond County, Virginia. (Wells 1993: 14)

Extensive fencing was essential to establishing spatial and functional order on the domestic and agricultural landscape. Early fences varied in design and construction based on use, including marking boundaries, providing security, or ornamentation. Examples frequently used in Virginia included varieties such as the Virginia rail fence, constructed of stacked rails and laid in a zigzag pattern, used to mark field and property boundaries due to the availability of raw material and overall

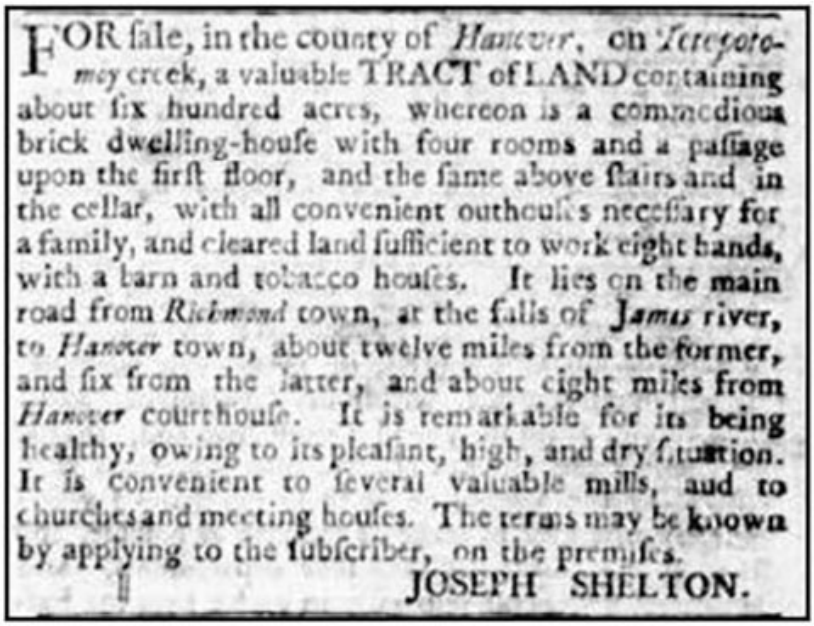
ease of construction such a design offered; the post and rail fence, constructed of posts placed in the ground and mortised to accept horizontally positioned milled or split planks; and the paled fence, similar to post and rail but featuring vertical boards nailed along its face. The post and rail or paled fence styles would have been preferred in areas close to the house for their ornamental qualities and would likely have been placed around kitchen gardens and orchards in order to prevent damage from free-ranging livestock. Archeological research has identified features related to a possible fence line located to the southeast of the house, although the date of such features has not yet been determined. (Patrick 1998: 97,100; AOA 2009: np)

Orchards of fruit trees also played a significant role in the landscape of eighteenth-century plantation life, located within the domestic landscape of the Shelton estate. Except for those located on estates of the wealthiest of planters, orchards during this time were most commonly in the form of “farm orchards,” plantings of fruit trees that were sprouted from seed. The trees of these orchards grew in less formal arrangements and each tree displayed individual traits of size, shape, and fruiting. The fruit harvested from these orchards was used almost exclusively in the production of hard cider, although other uses including baking and drying, animal fodder, and brandy. (Dolan 2009: 14-15)

The earliest details of the property on Totopotomoy Creek are provided by an advertisement listing the land and house for sale in the “Virginia Gazette” in 1777, and in land tax records from 1782. The Virginia Gazette advertisement describes the property as a 600-acre tract of land located approximately twelve miles from Richmond. Buildings on the property included a “commodious brick dwelling-house,” outhouses, tobacco houses, and a barn, as well as “all convenient outhouses necessary for a family;” the advertisement also mentions that there is enough land cleared to provide work for eight hands (Figure 1). As estimates vary on how much land was required per hand for efficient use with amounts ranging from twenty to fifty acres each, the Shelton land may have had between 160 and 400 acres under cultivation (although higher estimates generally include fallow land, wood lots, and other non-active use of land necessary for long-term agricultural production). (Rural Plains Chronology; Mayer 1991: 44-54)

The land tax records from 1782 list the property at Totopotomoy Creek as including 500 total acres, and record the presence of ten slaves, seven horses, and fifteen cattle. Owner Joseph Shelton is listed as residing in Louisa County during this time, indicating that the house at Totopotomoy Creek may not have been occupied at the time of this assessment. Mention is made of an overseer on the property, however, who would have supervised the slaves in Joseph’s absence. After transfer of the property to John Shelton III in 1784, records for the final years of the eighteenth century remain similar to that of 1782, although the numbers of slaves and livestock owned fluctuate slightly. (Rural Plains Chronology)

Other families living in Hanover County near the Sheltons at this time included the Tinsley family, who lived on the Totomoi property to the northwest of the future Totopotomoy Creek Unit. The house at Totomoi was built in 1799, and according to an 1803 Mutual Insurance Society policy measured thirty-two feet long by thirty-two feet wide, and was two stories in height. The detached kitchen was twenty-eight feet long by twenty feet wide, was one story in height, and stood thirty-eight feet from the house. Other structures located on the property included a barn, a stable, and an icehouse. Although no similar insurance policy has been found covering the buildings on the Shelton property, the Tinsley family was of similar standing both financially and socially. While this does not indicate what buildings were located on the Shelton property at the time, it does provide an example of how a similar property appeared during the turn of the nineteenth century. (Rippe 2009: 56)



FOR ſale, in the county of *Hanover*, on *Totopotomoy* creek, a valuable TRACT of LAND containing about ſix hundred acres, whereon is a commodious brick dwelling-houſe with four rooms and a paſſage upon the firſt floor, and the ſame above ſtairs and in the cellar, with all convenient outhouſes neceſſary for a family, and cleared land ſufficient to work eight hands, with a barn and tobacco houſes. It lies on the main road from *Richmond* town, at the falls of *James* river, to *Hanover* town, about twelve miles from the former, and ſix from the latter, and about eight miles from *Hanover* courthouſe. It is remarkable for its being healthy, owing to its pleaſant, high, and dry ſituation. It is convenient to ſeveral valuable mills, and to churches and meeting houſes. The terms may be known by applying to the ſubſcriber, on the premiſes.

JOSEPH SHELTON.

1777 Virginia Gazette advertisement for the sale of Rural Plains, p.2 col. 3.

ANTEBELLUM AGRICULTURE, 1800-1861

With the death of John Shelton III in 1798, the 500-acre Totopotomoy Creek estate was left to his widow, Ann Shelton, who sold a 63 ½ acre portion in 1801. By 1805 Ann had remarried, transferring ownership of the remaining 443 ½ acres of property at Totopotomoy Creek to her new husband Peter Foster. By 1830, four family members were listed at Rural Plains in addition to Foster (72): his wife Ann (70), son Edwin Shelton (32), Edwin's wife Sarah Oliver (20), and their daughter Harriett (1). Also counted in the U.S. Censuses were the male and female slaves owned by Peter Foster, which numbered 22 in 1810, 27 in 1820, and 31 in 1830. Foster retained ownership until Ann's death in 1831, at which time it reverted to the estate of John Shelton III under the care of John's adult son, Edwin Shelton. (Rural Plains Chronology)

Land tax records for Hanover County continued to record the owner as "John Shelton's Estate" through 1839. During that time, two new buildings were constructed on the property, according to land tax records: one valued at $196.75 in 1835, the other valued at $147.57 in 1836. These new structures may have been for a school that operated for several years at Rural Plains. Edwin Shelton's interest in education is documented by his position in 1835 as one of 13 trustees for the Washington Henry Academy in Hanover County. Two years later, he placed a newspaper ad announcing the opening of a school at his residence:
"SCHOOL FOR YOUNG LADIES The subscriber will open a school for young ladies, at his residence in Hanover county, about 10 miles from Richmond, on the 15th of January next. He has procured the services of Miss Abigail M. Converse, an approved Teacher, to give instruction in every department of study usually taught in the best female seminaries, excepting Music. The subscriber can receive a few additional scholars as boarders in his family. The character and state of society in his neighborhood, renders his situation an eligible one for those parents who wish to send their daughters abroad to school. Terms.—Board and Tuition, including lights, washing, & c., $100 for the scholastic year of 10 months. Edwin Shelton." (Richmond Enquirer, 30 Dec. 1837, Vol. XXXIV, Issue 68, 3, in Yocum 2012: 31)

The school operated for a number of years, continuing at least through 1841, providing approximately ten girls and young women education in, among other things, “French, drawing, worsted and wax flowers, and needlework.” Census records for 1850 suggest that the school had closed by that time. It was also at this time, in the 1842 advertisement for the school, that the first written reference to “Rural Plain” appears in connection with the Totopotomoy Creek estate. (Handwritten advertisement for a “Female School,” dated 15 November 1842, in Yocum 2012: 31)

Development of Rural Plains:
As with much of the rest of the South, land use in Tidewater Virginia during the antebellum years of the nineteenth century tended to reinforce the rural nature of the landscape as landowners focused on increasing their investments in land and slaves. Typical plantations in the region from this time period were between 150 and 250 acres, although those located closer to the coast and along major waterways such as the James River were frequently larger. Available land was more scarce in interior Virginia than in the Deep South, and the smaller plantations often raised and marketed a wider variety of crops and livestock. This diversity resulted in a multi-faceted landscape featuring a mosaic of improved and unimproved acreage composed of woodland, croplands, animal pastures, hayfields, and domestic spaces and public areas centering on the main dwelling house. (Hilliard 1994: 110)

As administrator of John Shelton III’s estate, Colonel Edwin Shelton attempted to sell the property at Totopotomoy Creek through an advertisement in the Richmond Enquirer. The 1831 advertisement described improvements to the property as including “a barn and the usual outhouses and a comfortable two story brick dwelling,” while noting that he was residing at the farm at that time. Evidently, Edwin was unable to find a buyer, and although the 393 ½-acre property remained listed under John Shelton III’s estate in the land tax records, Edwin began making improvements including additional buildings, and was liable for taxes on the property. By 1840 ownership had been officially transferred to Edwin. (Rural Plains Chronology)

During the decades leading up to the Civil War, Edwin Shelton dramatically expanded the facilities at the farm on Totopotomoy Creek, increasing the property size from 393 ½ acres to 893 ¼ acres by 1856. In addition to tax records, documents from the daily management of the farm, by that time known as Rural Plains, provide details about the activities taking place during this time. Entries in the Rural Plains farm ledger include information about the crops sown and harvested during the mid-nineteenth century, such as corn, sweet potatoes, wheat, watermelons, oats, hay, tobacco, Irish potatoes, peaches, apples, hogs, and beef cattle. According to the ledger, Edwin focused most of his efforts on the cultivation of wheat, watermelons, and corn, although potatoes and hay were also noted in the ledger. Other crops received significantly less attention, indicating lower production levels. Locations of crops were identified in the ledger according to previous use of particular areas, such as “corn land” and “watermelon patch;” while these would have been well-known locations to Edwin, the lack of a map or additional orientation information makes modern identification of these areas difficult. (Rural Plains Chronology; Rural Plains Farm Ledger)

Transportation to market of the crops grown on the property at Totopotomoy Creek was facilitated by the expanded reliance on waterways as well as the road system that had been extended throughout Hanover County. These transportation routes connected villages and rural estates with larger towns and cities as well as shipping points such as Newcastle and Hanovertown on the Pamunkey River. Although it does not delineate the Shelton property, the 1820 map of Hanover County by John Wood clearly displays this well-developed network of roads throughout the area (Figure 2), as does an 1827 map of the region by Herman Boye.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Federal Agriculture Schedules, Edwin owned 860 acres in 1850 (the earliest year for which an Agricultural Schedule of the Federal Census is available for Hanover County), 400 of which were classified as improved. By 1860 that amount had increased to 888 acres, with 488 improved. Despite this relatively modest increase in improved land by the time of the 1860 census, Edwin’s crop production had significantly increased in both variety and overall harvest amounts. The 1850 schedule lists Edwin as raising wheat, Indian corn, oats, wool, peas and beans, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, hay, and a market garden of unknown composition. By 1860, he had significantly increased production of wheat (from 975 bushels in 1850 to 1,675 bushels in

1860), Indian corn (1,350 bushels to 20,000 bushels), wool (40 pounds to 98 pounds), and sweet potatoes (100 bushels to 150 bushels), as well as added tobacco to the crops produced (reporting 5,969 pounds in 1860). Crops which were reported with lower amounts included oats (300 bushels down to 150), peas and beans (55 down to 25), and hay (22 tons down to 12 tons). Irish potatoes remained the same at 100 bushels. (U.S. Bureau of Census)

Edwin utilized slave labor to work his expansive holdings. As of 1850 (the first year for which a Slave Schedule for the U.S. Federal Census is available), Edwin owned forty-two slaves. While most of the people listed as slaves likely worked as field hands, others likely served in a domestic capacity or were hired out to local craftsmen and farmers. By 1860 the number of slaves at Rural Plains counted in the Federal Census had been reduced to thirty-seven living in eight slave quarters. It is possible that some slaves resided in other buildings on the property however (such as domestics staying in or near the main house), as the number of slaves living in each slave quarter is not recorded. These slave quarters would have been clearly visible components of the agricultural and domestic landscape, although their significance would have varied depending on the role of the observer. To the Sheltons, these buildings would have existed as a backdrop to the daily operations of the farm with significance similar to that of other outbuildings within the domestic precinct. To those slaves who lived in the quarters, however, these buildings would have represented the central focal point of their own social and domestic interactions. The buildings would have likely been accompanied by small garden plots, service areas, and open areas of social interaction. (U.S. Bureau of Census; Upton 1982: 63)

As in earlier years, the use of fencing would have played a significant role in organizing the landscape, serving to demarcate agricultural boundaries, protect gardens and domestic areas from livestock, and delineate the service areas of the domestic precinct. The use of fence types to address specific needs on the property is likely to have remained consistent over time, with Virginia rail fences used to enclose cultivated fields and post and rail, paled, and picket fences used in proximity to the domestic precinct for various reasons. Following this model, Rural Plains would have likely featured Virginia rail fences in its outlying agricultural areas due to the ease of construction and ready availability of materials. Likewise, fencing closer to the domestic precinct would have likely been of the post and rail, paled, or picket styles, depending on specific uses. Similar to the paled fence but usually of lighter construction and serving a primarily ornamental function, the picket fence would likely have appeared closest to the house itself. A sketch of the house by Alfred R. Waud drawn around the time of the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek displays just such a style of fence extending to the front and side yards of the house. Archeological research has identified two potential post-holes located to the southeast of the house and aligned in an east-west fashion, corroborating the presence of the fence shown in the Waud sketch. (Patrick 1998: 101; AOA 2009: np)

An account of the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek provided by Walter Shelton gives some additional insight into how the area around the house appeared before it suffered the effects of war. In this account, Walter described Rural Plains as:
"a beautiful place [with] all of the place fenced… [The] Dwelling House & outhouses [were] in fine condition [with a] nice fence around the yard & our fine Orchards. One apple orchard [was] just across the main road and another across the swamp that leads to the Lee Farm. Just to the left of the back of the garden was a fine peach orchard. Higher up in the field was another fine peach orchard." (Shelton Family Papers)

Although descriptions revealing the precise locations of these orchards and other features are lacking, this account offers a visualization of various agricultural and domestic physical landmarks within the Totopotomoy Creek property as it appeared prior to the Civil War, including characterizations of both agricultural and domestic landscapes.

The Shelton property included at least one, and likely two, cemeteries by the antebellum period. A family cemetery may have been located on the site of a recently identified burial ground, located within a wooded area on sloping terrain to the southwest of the Shelton House. This cemetery currently contains two headstones, both appearing to feature death dates of 1855 and names of families known to have been related to the Shelton family through marriage (the most legible

headstone bears the name Ada Lumpkin, granddaughter of Edwin Shelton, while the other more worn headstone is engraved with the Southall surname). Although no additional headstones are currently visible, other Shelton family graves from this period (as well as later periods) were exhumed from the property and relocated to Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond in 1952. A slave cemetery, with burials that may have been ephemerally marked or remain unmarked is likely to have also existed on the property, although evidence of a slave burial ground has yet to be located. In an interview conducted by Robert E.L. Krick and David Ruth of Richmond NBP, William R. Shelton, Jr. indicated the presence of a slave cemetery to the west or southwest of the Shelton House, although the exact location was not ascertained. Likewise, an article written for the "New York Times Magazine" also mentions a slave cemetery located "out beyond the garden…where the little sunken graves close together were the only monuments to the sleepers down below." Further archeological research would likely provide additional evidence to assist in identifying the location and extent of these funerary features. (Interview with William R. Shelton; Shelton 1928: 19)

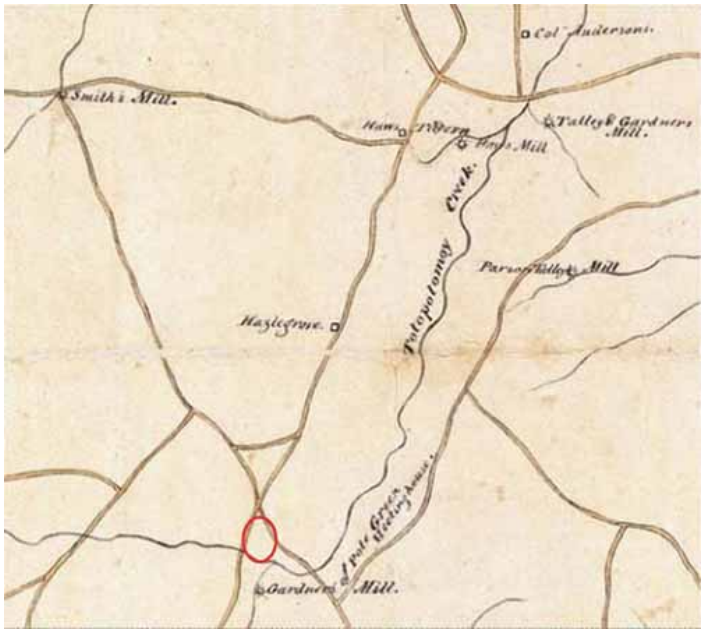


Figure 2. Detail of 1820 Wood Map Showing Location of Totopotomoy Creek Unit.

CIVIL WAR, 1861-1865

Other than visits from foraging parties, both Union and Confederate, Rural Plains largely avoided the direct effects of troop movements, battles, and skirmishes of the Civil War until late spring of 1864. During Gen. Ulysses Grant's Overland Campaign, the Union Army moved southeast through Virginia, frequently engaging Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia as it struggled to destroy the Confederate forces. Unable to achieve a decisive battlefield victory, Grant continually moved to his left in an attempt to outflank
the Confederates and turn the opposing army's right flank. Following the stalemate at the Battle of North Anna, Grant again directed his forces southeast, maneuvering through Hanover and King William Counties. After crossing the Pamunkey River, the Union Army approached Totopotomoy Creek at Rural Plains on May 29 where advanced units began to encounter Confederate picket lines placed on the north side of the creek. As Union troops pushed forward to test the Confederates' position, the picket lines fell back to the opposite side of the creek. Lines of battle formed up along either side of the creek, with the Union lines extending southeast from the Tinsley Family's Totomoi plantation northwest of Rural Plains, to the east side of Rural Point Road. These lines crossed the Rural Plains property to the west of the Shelton House and continued east and southeast through the fields below the house paralleling the course of Totopotomoy Creek (Figures 3 and 4).

Several first-hand accounts of the battle, in the form of letters and diaries written at the time of the battle as well as accounts that were recalled much later, give vivid details of the events of the battle and of the physical appearance of Rural Plains. Lieutenant Robert S. Robertson of the 93rd New York Infantry, serving in the First Division Brigade under Col. Nelson A. Miles, described his first encounter with Rural Plains and its inhabitants:
"… The road we were on led directly to Richmond and we were 11 miles from that place … a short distance on we came to a large brick house on the left of the road with a large wheatfield on the left and rear of it and a level ploughed field extending about half a mile toward the Cold Harbor Road. The men on the skirmish line knocked the palings off the garden fence to pass through and as a number of them stopped in the garden, I rode there to learn the cause, and found they could not

resist the temptation offered by a large bed of ripe strawberries, and were busy eating them, unmindful of the bullets which were flying around."

Moving first to the east side of the house to assess the situation, Lt. Robertson, Col. Miles, and other officers then entered the eastern door of the house and passed through the great hall and out the western door, where they found Mrs. Shelton and her daughters and youngest son Edwin outside the basement door (next to the west porch). After the soldiers assured the terrified family that they did not intend to harm them, they tried to convince them to leave the house, offering them passage either to the rear of the Union lines or over to the Confederate lines. The family repeatedly refused offers to evacuate them, claiming that one of the women was too ill to travel. The family remained at the house throughout the battle, sheltering in the basement as mortars exploded in the rooms above them (Review comment, L. Lowe, 28 July 2025).

In preparation for the battle, the Union troops quickly erected defensive earthworks throughout night of May 29 and the next day, during which time the Union soldiers were under constant fire from Confederate artillery and sharpshooters located across the creek. Despite the danger, Union soldiers were able to construct the connected series of earthworks that they promptly armed with both cannons and mortars, silencing the Confederate guns. An order that went out to Maj. Gen. David Birney at his position located north of what is now Studley Road, from Lieut. Col. C.H. Morgan described the intended design of these earthworks as artillery batteries connected by rifle-pits, and indicating that Brig. Gen. Francis Barlow's forces, located to the south of the road and immediately to the rear (west) of the Shelton House, were to construct similar fortifications. (Brown 1906: 58; Scott 1891: 300)

The work to prepare the battlefield so transformed the landscape of Rural Plains that Walter Shelton barely recognized his own home:
"The next morning when I looked out I did not know the place. There was a line of fortification extending through the place all fences gone some of the out houses pulled down and put in the fortification. They used the fences Houses the fruit trees plows cultivators & all kind of farm implements in building the fortification. They left a few Apple trees on the road. The fighting commenced early the next morning and continued most of the day." (Shelton Family Papers, in Yocum 2012: 39)

The Shelton House itself provided a valuable prospect for observing the Confederate forces. Two Union signal officers were posted on the roof of the house to direct artillery fire and monitor the position and movement of the enemy. The use of the house as a signal station, as well as the headquarters for General Hancock, made it a target for Confederate fire, and more than 50 shells hit the house, many of them penetrating the walls and exploding inside of the rooms. Union soldiers were diligent about extinguishing fires in the house caused by the exploding shells.

In addition to the soldiers' accounts, sources of information about the appearance landscape from this period include Civil War maps showing the configuration of the earthworks, and two sketches of the property by "Harper's Weekly" illustrator Alfred R. Waud. The first of Waud's sketches depicts the Shelton House itself, as well as the portion of the domestic precinct immediately surrounding it, while the second sketch shows the field to the west of the house, facing Totopotomoy Creek from the perspective of the Union soldiers located along that line (Figures 5 and 6).

The first of Waud's sketches of the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek was unpublished, and looks northwest towards the Shelton House displaying features which were present in the immediate area during the time of the battle. Specifically, in addition to the house itself this sketch shows the presence of a low fence surrounding the house, a cluster of smaller outbuildings located to the rear of the house, several large trees arrayed throughout the yard and domestic precinct, and what appears to be a bird house located in the right foreground. There is also what appears to be the faint outline of a barn or similar structure located to the far right of the sketch; however, there is currently no supporting documentary or archaeological evidence to suggest the presence of such a structure at this location. Waud also labeled by species the trees that appear in his sketch (including button [wood], mulberry, and locust), indicating the significant nature of their presence in the domestic precinct. The distinction of these trees is also recorded in soldiers' accounts of the battle, which

describe large trees as being in the immediate vicinity of the house and note that they received a significant amount of damage during the course of the artillery engagement. (Brown 1906: 59)

The cluster of buildings depicted to the rear of the Shelton House in Waud's sketch likely represents a group of slave quarters, a possible smokehouse, and a possible detached kitchen. As described in the previous section, these building types would have played a crucial role in the domestic function of daily life at the Shelton farm. The slave quarters would likely have housed those slaves who were assigned to domestic service around the house, or to duties in those fields that were closest to the house precinct. The detached kitchen would have been accessible from the main house while remaining removed enough to prevent damage to the house in the event of fire. The smokehouse would have been positioned nearby for similar reasons.

The presence of outbuildings to the rear of the Shelton House was also noted in the account of one soldier. Augustus C. Brown included a description of a "semi-circle of negro quarters" of frame and log construction located between the Union earthworks and the Shelton House. This description is particularly compelling, as it is the only one available that includes the orientation of the buildings in relation to each other and the main house. Unfortunately, Brown does not mention the number of cabins within that semi-circle, and of the five buildings depicted in the Waud sketch two appear to be a kitchen and a smoke house. The 1860 agricultural census of Rural Plains lists eight slave quarters on the property, although it has no indication of where on the property any of these building might be located. It is reasonable to estimate that while some of the slave cabins were located to the rear of the house, some would likely have been found close to the more distant agricultural fields to facilitate access by the slaves assigned to work those areas. (Brown 1906: 58)

Soldiers' accounts also gave descriptions of the property surrounding the Shelton House, including the arrangement of fields, geographical features, roadways, and vegetation coverage. Augustus Brown described the field between the Shelton House and Totopotomoy Creek as a "cornfield of fifty acres" in and next to which they stacked arms before throwing up earthworks on the 30 of May, 1864. Other descriptions, such as that in Robert S. Robertson's account, mention "a large wheat field on the rear of [the house] and a level ploughed field extending about half a mile towards Cold Harbor Road (now Polly Hundley's Corner)." (Brown 1909: 58; Walker and Walker 1965: 198)

Alfred R. Waud's second sketch showing "General Barlow in Front of the Rebel Works, 12 Miles from Richmond" at the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek supports these descriptions, depicting Union soldiers in a field planted in what appears to be waist-high grain crop, and engaging the clearly visible Confederate line across the creek in the background. The sketch also depicts mature trees on both the near and far side of the Totopotomoy Creek ravine with the majority located along the far bank. The perspective from which the sketch is drawn appears to look in the west-southwesterly direction from the Shelton House as there are very few trees shown in the foreground of the sketch, making it similar to the depiction of vegetation shown in that direction on the 1867 Michler map. While this provides imagery of the agricultural landscape for this particular section of the Totopotomoy Creek property, there is no detail in Waud's second sketch regarding the domestic precinct and land to the south of the house.

Regarding Totopotomoy Creek itself, one piece of official correspondence between Union officers recalled the creek's banks as "steep and abrupt, but not very high at the crossing, and indeed along there appears to be no obstacle to crossing owing to the stream; the high bluffs and the enemy's guns apparently being the only obstacles." This description is similar to present characteristics of the creek at Rural Plains, with little in the way of alteration beyond the installation of a power line on the Rural Plains side of the creek and a sewage system on the opposite bank. Situated between more prominent Battles of Spotsylvania Court House and Cold Harbor, the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek helped define the shifting nature of Grant's maneuvering to the south and east as he attempted to turn Lee's right flank and crush the Army of Northern Virginia. Repeatedly thwarted in his goal of a decisive battlefield victory, Grant was forced to continue moving his troops as Lee successfully defended Richmond. This struggle between opposing armies eventually resulted in the Siege of Petersburg, extending through the latter half of 1864 and the first quarter of 1865. (Scott 1891: 297)

The impact the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek had on the landscape of Rural Plains and on the

Shelton family itself included physical effects such as the construction of earthen fortifications throughout the property, the destruction of orchards, fences, and outbuildings, and significant damage to the Shelton House itself.

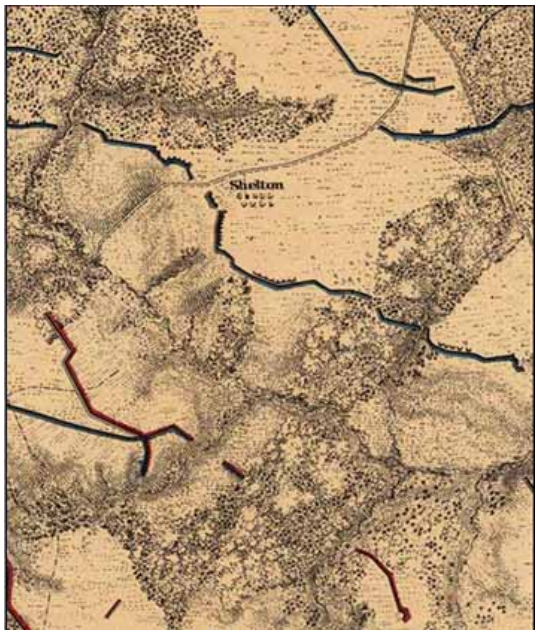


Figure 3. Detail of the 1867 Michler Map of the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek.



Figure 4. Map of the Battle Fields of the Totopotomoy [sic.] and Bethesda Church (detail) by J.C. Duane, 1864, showing the location of the Shelton House, earthworks, woodlands, creeks, and topology of the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield. (Library of Congress)



Figure 5. A sketch prepared in 1864 entitled "At Totopotomoy Creek, Va." by Alfred R. Waud, Showing View of the Shelton House Looking North.



Figure 6. Drawing by A. Waud for Harper's Weekly depicting Union line of infantry engaging Confederate troops from the rear of the Shelton House during the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek.

RECONSTRUCTION AND POST-RECONSTRUCTION, 1865-c.1927

Land Use:
As a result of a large-scale military presence within Virginia throughout the Civil War, large portions of farmland were left fallow as farmers struggled to cope with the heavily damaged infrastructure. Barns and other agricultural buildings had been burned or dismantled, fences torn down, livestock carried

away or slaughtered, crops burned in the field, woodlots decimated, and roadways and canals damaged or destroyed as soldiers attempted to disrupt supply lines. With the loss of slave labor, the South also faced complete restructuring of farm operations as landowners struggled to cope with the newly implemented wage-based labor system within the confines of a labor-intensive agricultural economy. These factors prevented much of the South from experiencing economic success for decades following the Civil War. (Foner 1988: 170-171)

Agricultural labor after the Civil War included newly freed slaves, as well as tenant farmers. Despite their newly won freedom, however, many former slaves were unsure of how to sell their labor, and former masters were unused to associating with labor on a consensual basis. In many areas of the South, free labor systems evolved that were only marginally different from the slave labor system, with landowners withholding payment until the crops had been harvested and sold to prevent workers from leaving during the growing season. Although this left a large amount of control in the hands of the landowners, laborers found themselves gaining autonomy as they demanded changes in the methods of payment. Beginning soon after the close of the Civil War and becoming widespread by 1870, tenure agreements known as sharecropping signaled the final stage in the decentralization of plantation agriculture. Under this system, landowners made arrangements with individual families specifying the family's responsibility for a particular piece of land, in return for which they would typically receive one third of the year's crop. This system allowed property owners to avoid the difficulties presented by the shortage of cash and credit in the postwar South while giving laborers an alternative to gang labor and daily white supervision. Despite the nationwide depression which began with the Panic of 1873, Southern agriculture continued to improve following the lows seen during the years of the Reconstruction period. (Foner 1988: 171-174)

Shelton Family:
As elsewhere in Virginia, the Shelton family experienced a decline in the overall production of their farm, which was accompanied by a significant loss in value. The overall cash value of Rural Plains dropped from $18,860 in 1860 to only $4,000 in 1870, while the value of farming implements and machinery also declined from $1,000 to $100 over the same period. Despite this loss of capital, Col. Edwin Shelton continued farming. Although reduced in scale, livestock production continued during the decades following the war, as did the cultivation of grain crops. Additionally, the farm ledger records the payment of wages for labor during these postwar years, indicating that Edwin hired workers, likely including former slaves, to assist in growing crops and raising livestock. Entries in the farm ledger document amounts paid to these laborers as well as the amount of time they worked. (U.S Bureau of the Census; Rural Plains Farm Ledger)

For the years between the end of the war and 1874, the Rural Plains plantation maintained a total of 815 ¾ acres, to which it had been reduced by sale of 77 ½ acres in 1861. The death of Edwin Shelton in 1874 heralded the division of the core estate as the property was divided amongst his heirs, including a 406 acre "life estate for his widow, Sarah Shelton." (Rural Plains Chronology)

When the estate was distributed, the property was surveyed and a plat drawn in order to show the extent of that property which was to be affected. This plat, included in Hanover County Deed Book 13, shows the Rural Plains property as extending east from its current boundaries to a line east side of modern Rural Point Road (Figure 7). Additionally, the plat illustrates the inclusion of a 30-acre parcel of land located on the north side of modern Studley Road (State Route 606) featuring a building identified as an overseer's house. By 1879 the property, which had been bequeathed to Sarah Shelton as a life estate, had been partitioned as well, including one parcel of 126-¼ acres assigned to Walter M. Shelton and his wife that included the main house and was the predecessor to today's 124.4 acre Totopotomoy Creek Unit. (Rural Plains Farm Ledger)

The agricultural production of Rural Plains continued to decrease between the time of the Federal Census of 1870 and that of 1880, as local markets struggled with the effects of the depression of 1873. Cash value for the Rural Plains farm increased from $4,000 to $5,000, but production levels in both livestock and grain crops decreased. The total amount of livestock raised during the year prior to each respective census was reduced from fifty to seventeen animals, and wheat, corn, and oats all decreased by between fifty and eighty percent. The only crop reported to have experienced an increase of any sort was sweet potatoes, which grew from ten bushels in 1870 to five hundred

bushels in 1880. (U.S. Bureau of the Census)

This loss of agricultural production during the final decades of the nineteenth century strained the Shelton's finances, and likely contributed to the mortgaging of the property on at least three separate occasions to cover debts. In 1903 Walter Shelton defaulted on a loan taken out against Rural Plains, and the property was sold at auction to Walter's son, William R. Shelton. (Rural Plains Chronology)

Truck farming became widespread in Hanover County during these years. It required intensive labor, a considerable knowledge of markets, and delivery of produce at the peak of ripeness. Prior to refrigeration, produce was susceptible to rapidly spoiling. During the initial years of the twentieth century, William Shelton raised a variety of vegetable produce, transporting it by truck to markets in Richmond; fruits and vegetables grown and sold in this manner including potatoes, artichokes, watermelons, and cantaloupes. (Interview with William R. Shelton)

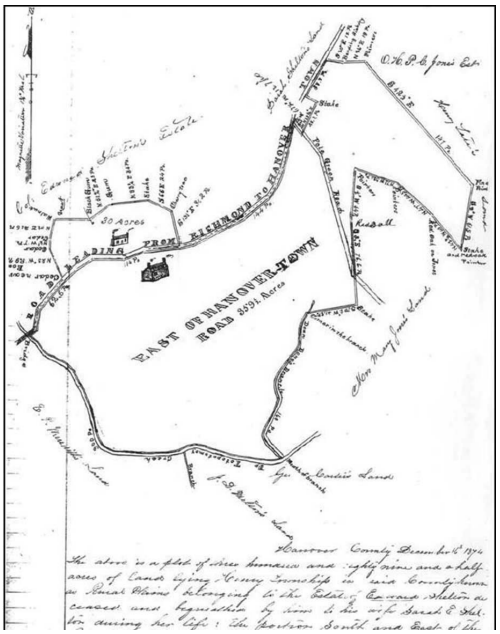


Figure 7. Plat map of Rural Plains drawn in 1874. (Richmond NBP archives)

ESTABLISHMENT OF RURAL PLAINS NURSERY AND THE 20TH CENTURY, c.1927-2000

Battlefield Commemoration:
The first organization to commemorate Civil War battlefields was the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association in 1864. It was administered by veterans dedicated to preservation of the Gettysburg battlefield and memorialization of key battlefield sites, events, and individuals. The approaches established by the association to marking lines of the battle were later adopted by administrators of National Military Parks. During the 1890s, the nation's first four National Military Parks were established at Chickamauga/Chattanooga, Gettysburg, Shiloh, and Vicksburg, and influenced battlefield commemoration around the nation, including Richmond National Battlefield Park during the early to mid-twentieth century. The military parks protected battlefield land from development, in some cases restored historic landscape features, provided opportunities for military training and historical research, and allowed for reunions of veterans that were hoped could contribute to much needed national reunification. Battlefield preservation and commemoration was very popular, but ultimately proved too expensive for the federal government to fund. Soon, Congress would begin to debate methods for prioritizing land acquisition and sharing the costs associated with acquisition and management with other entities.

Despite the national attention paid to battlefield preservation and the large number of battlefields located in the Richmond, Virginia, area, no sites were targeted for protection during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first proposal for a public commemorative effort was a road to link important sites associated with the 1862 Peninsula and 1864 Overland Campaigns in 1914. The proposal was never pursued due to the onset of World War I. All other Civil War commemorative efforts conducted between the 1880s and 1920s revolved around grassroots efforts and activities, such as reunions of Civil War veterans, and the establishment of individual monuments and commemorative and interpretive signage on privately-owned land as allowed by the owners. (Willett 1957: 27)

One of the groups that worked to mark historic battlefield sites in the Richmond area and indicate

their significance was the Battlefield Markers Association, which was established in the 1920s. Among its leaders was Douglas Southall Freeman, a Richmond writer, editor, and historian. Freeman and the others involved in the organization raised funds sufficient to erect fifty-nine commemorative markers on key battlefield sites around the city by 1925. The markers featured a consistent design comprised of granite-block bases supporting inscribed bronze tablets. The first marker was dedicated by Robert E. Lee's grandson, Dr. George Bolling Lee, at the Walnut Grove Church on November 6, 1925. Two of these markers, numbered 50 and 51, were placed along Studley Road near the Shelton House and indicated the nearby Union and Confederate lines associated with the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek. In 1932, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, one of the oldest preservation organizations in the nation, erected a monument along Studley Road northeast of the Shelton House. (Willett 1957: 27-28)

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the federal government established several programs that were intended to provide employment for Americans while carrying out public works projects, such as the construction of public buildings and roads, and arts programs. These include the Works Progress Administration (WPA, later the Works Projects Administration) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). One of the programs involved documenting historic properties. In 1936, Rural Plains was documented as part of the Works Progress Administration of Virginia Historical Inventory by J. Archer Evans of Richmond, Virginia, who prepared the documentation as part of an inventory of historic houses sponsored by the Virginia Conservation Commission. The records of the project include a narrative description of the architectural details of the dwelling, its history as conveyed by William R. Shelton, Sr., and photographs, all of which survive today to record the property at that time.

In addition to the documentation of the Shelton property by the WPA, an additional study was conducted at the property in 1936 by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). Records of this project similarly survive and provide researchers insight into the property during the early twentieth century.

Shelton Family:
About 1927, the Shelton family established an ornamental plant nursery at Rural Plains. While little is specifically known about the nursery operations, advertisements have been located for the nursery in the April 1933 edition of "Garden Gossip," the 1941 Ashland Herald-Progress, and an undated copy of the nursery catalogue that was found in the Shelton papers. The Rural Plains Nursery catalogue notes they are "Collectors and Growers of Rosebays, Hardy Broadleaf Evergreens, Conifers, Ornamental Trees and Shrubs, Peonies, and Bulbs." The 1941 advertisement referred to the nursery as offering "Flowers and Shrubs for Old Virginia Gardens from one of Virginia's Oldest Gardens." Several species and sizes of plant material are indicated as available in the catalogue.

Rural Plains Nursery appears to have done business with notable landscape architects Arthur Shurcliff, Alden Hopkins, and Charles Gillette. The Shelton papers indicate that Shurcliff's agent visited the nursery in December 1928, and later placed orders for plant material. The 2009 Cultural Landscape Study completed by Tonia W. Horton and Lauren F. Noe indicates that the records suggest Shurcliff's inspector's "interest in obtaining 'The Juniperus Virginia (at Studley Patrick Henry's Birthplace)' as recounted by William Shelton in a letter to Shurcliff dated March 30, 1929." Nursery operations continued on the property until 2005. There is speculation that some of the materials obtained from Rural Plains Nursery were used in the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, although this is not substantiated by documentation. (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: np)

Although agricultural production continued at Rural Plains throughout the twentieth century (including the raising of hogs, which were allowed to forage in the wooded northwestern section of the property until as recently as the 1990s), portions of the property were altered to accommodate the addition of horticultural cultivation. Fields that had previously been devoted to agricultural production would have been converted for the purpose of raising ornamental plants such as roses, boxwoods, trees, and the wide variety of other shrubs and plants offered for sale. Maps or descriptions providing orientation of early nursery layouts have yet to be located, the fields currently planted in horticultural species are concentrated in areas immediately surrounding the domestic precinct. (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: np; Shelton-Oliver-Winn Family Papers)

As the twentieth century progressed, the Shelton family demonstrated an interest in preserving and commemorating the historic nature of Rural Plains. Articles written during the 1920s for the Richmond Times-Dispatch and the "New York Times Magazine" discuss the history of the property and include interviews with the residents of the house who recount anecdotes of events that occurred during the Civil War and its aftermath. Other articles written in 1955 and c.1971 also include interviews with Shelton family members. The newspaper and magazine articles about the Shelton family and Rural Plains published in the twentieth century generally relied on historical information provided by the family. Many of the details repeated by these articles, such as the house construction date of 1670 and the marriage of Patrick Henry in the house, have been called into question by recent research. The Shelton family's interest in preserving and acknowledging the historic significance of Rural Plains culminated in the nomination and subsequent listing of the property in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places in 1975.

During the twentieth century, the amount of land dedicated to agricultural use was reduced from approximately 60 percent to approximately 40 percent. With one exception, the areas located closest to Totopotomoy Creek to the south of the house comprised the most significant example of this reversion, with much of new tree growth represented by planted pine trees, although these areas now contain a wide variety of both pine and hardwoods. Examples of agricultural fields which were not allowed to grow into woodlots appear to have remained under continuous agricultural cultivation, although hedgerows which had been established between these fields grew thicker. Other notable features visible in aerial photographs of the 1930s and 1950s include earthworks from the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek and Studley Road (State Route 606), which was realigned in 1962 (Figures 8 and 9).

Earthwork remnants from the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek are visible in both of these aerial photographs, crossing the Rural Plains property in a manner similar to that depicted in the 1867 Michler map. The 1936 aerial photograph shows a segmented line of earthworks through the fields and tree lines to the south and southwest of the Shelton House, with a particularly visible section angling to the northwest on the west side of Pear Lane. By the time of the 1953 aerial photograph, this earthwork is still distinctive, but is less clearly visible despite the greater resolution of the later photograph. This interpretation is corroborated by the recollections of William R. Shelton, Jr., who stated that earthworks extending across the field to the south of the house had been gradually plowed down as the field continued to be cultivated for agricultural purposes.

The presence of fruit orchards in Virginia had decreased significantly by the twentieth century. The commercial orchard industry in Virginia had experienced a significant boom and bust by the 1920s, and tree numbers fell from approximately nine million in 1906 to four million in 1937. Any orchards that remained on the property by this time were likely removed in order to facilitate the newly established nursery operation.

In 1962, Studley Road was realigned between Totopotomoy Creek and the entrance to Rural Plains to reduce the curves (Figure 10). This realignment expanded the Rural Plains property to include the former roadbed between the western-most driveway entrance and a point several hundred yards to the west. However, it also encroached on the field located in the western portion of the property, restricting the agricultural use of the northern portion of that field. The realignment caused the Freeman Marker, erected in 1925 on the roadside, to be located more than 70 feet from the new roadway. Rather than moving the marker, a semi-circular turnout was constructed to provide motorists access to the marker in its original position.

There are also a number of photographs of the Shelton House dating from prior to the 1930s through the present, with the bulk of them from the mid-twentieth century. These photographs document the development of the area immediate surrounding the home, including the evolution of ornamental landscaping directly adjacent to the house as well as alterations to the yard. Likewise, the presence of specimen trees within the confines of the yard is documented in these photographs. In addition to large shade trees, photographs of the front of the house show numerous shrubs along the house foundation, flanking the front steps, and bordering the driveway. In a photograph of the Shelton House taken for a New York Times Magazine article published April 19, 1928, canonical evergreen shrubbery is visible planted along the front foundation of the house, with two larger examples flanking

the front porch steps (Figure 11). In photographs taken for the1936 Historic American Building Survey (HABS) and Virginia Historical Inventory in 1936, however, these evergreens appear to have been replaced with boxwoods (Figures 12 and 13). A subsequent photograph of the Shelton House from the 1960s demonstrates the steady maturation of these boxwoods.

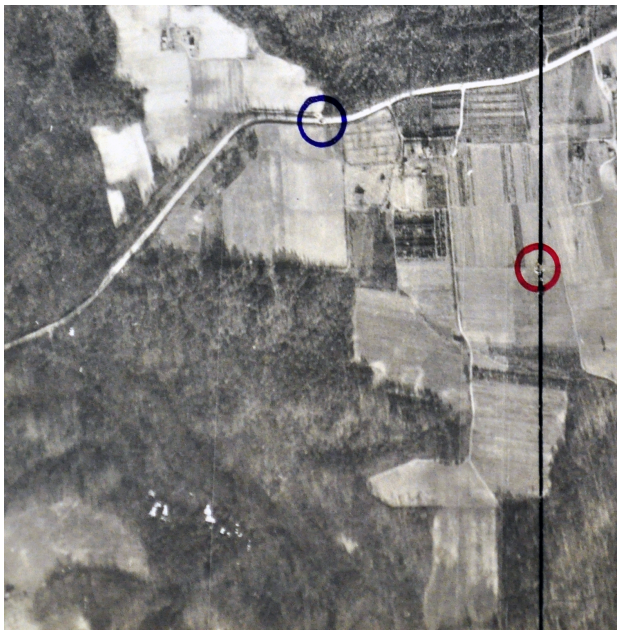


Figure 8. Aerial photograph of Rural Plains, 1936 (the colored circles are on the original copy of the aerial, and their purpose is unknown). (Virginia Department of Transportation)



Figure 9. Aerial photograph of Rural Plains, 1953. (Virginia Department of Transportation)

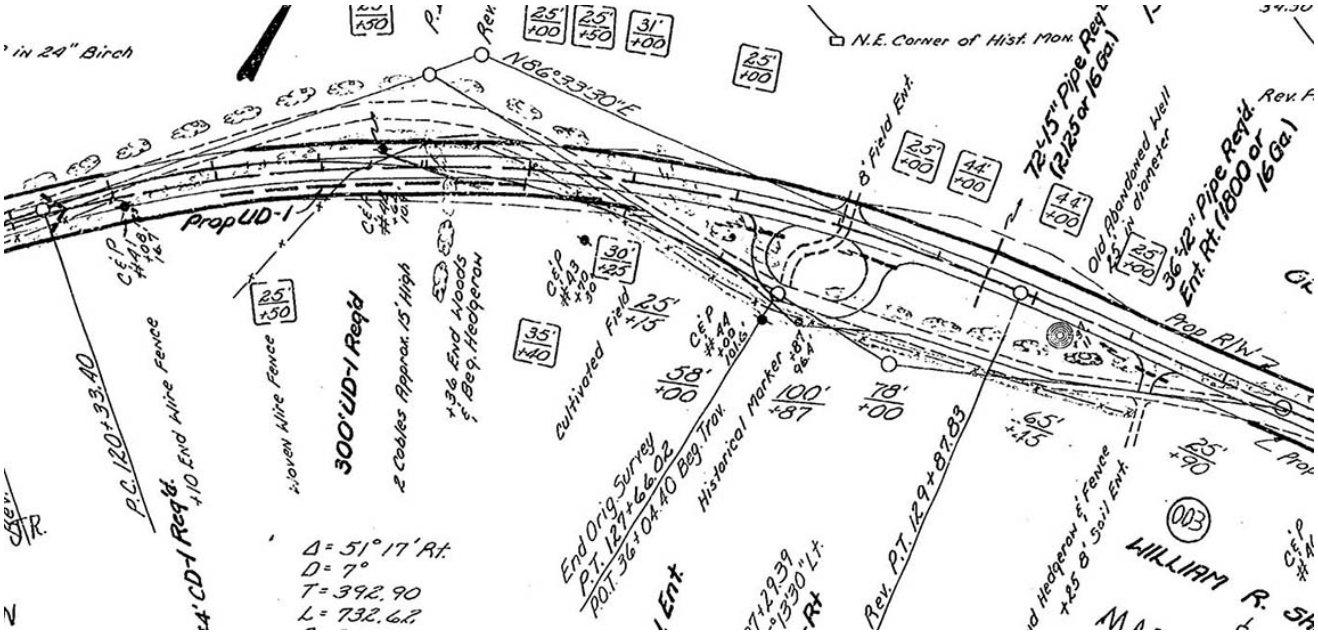


Figure 10. Detail of a drawing for the realignment of Studley Road in 1962. (Virginia Department of Transportation)



Figure 11. Shelton House circa 1928. (Richmond NBP archives)



Figure 12. HABS Photograph of east facade of the Shelton House 1936. (Richmond NBP archives)



Figure 13. A detail of the left side of Figure 12 shows a fence post and an unidentified building in the background. (Richmond NBP archives)

LOCAL BATTLEFIELD CONSERVATION AND NATIONAL PARK SERVICE STEWARDSHIP, 2000-2026

In 2000 William R. Shelton, Jr., the last member of the Shelton family to own the house and land at Rural Plains, sold the property to the Totopotomoy Battlefield at Rural Plains Foundation while retaining life-estate occupancy of the house and the surrounding 20 acres. This transferred ownership of the Shelton house and the remaining 124 acres of the property to the Foundation for the purpose of preservation. On June 1, 2006, less than a month after William Shelton's death, the property was conveyed to the federal government to be administered by the NPS as the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains Unit of the existing Richmond National Battlefield Park (NBP).

Following its acquisition of the property, Richmond NBP began several research projects intended to support the physical restoration of the interior and exterior of the Shelton House, as well as maintenance of the grounds and development of interpretive information aimed at integrating the unit into the Park's interpretive themes. These efforts include archeological surveys on select portions of the property, a nursery stock inventory and assessment, vegetative analysis throughout the property including a dendroecological study, a Historic Structures Report, a Cultural Landscape Survey, and a Cultural Landscape Report. The purpose of these efforts is to assemble a baseline conditions assessment of all features located throughout the unit. Additionally, initial rehabilitative projects such as work on the roof and exterior of the Shelton House and erosion control measures taken on Pear Lane are intended to stabilize key resource features within the unit in order to prevent further deterioration while permanent rehabilitative alternatives are considered.

Landscape Changes Since 2015:
Changes to the landscape since the original 2015 CLI was completed include:
--Several projects to restore the exterior of the Shelton House to its 1864 appearance include removal of the 20th century porch, restoration of the 19th century porch (including the addition of wheelchair entry capability), repair of exterior masonry and wooden architectural elements, and replacement of the metal roof with a wooden shake roof. (PEPC 68914)
--Removal of approximately 6 acres of invasive vegetation. (PEPC 60877)
--Establishment of a crushed oyster shell path extending from a wayside at the east edge of the Shelton House yard directly to the east porch of the house. (PEPC 82097)
--Removal of 20th century vegetation, including 2 large boxwood hedges and approximately 4 acres of tree and brush removal. (PEPC 74910)
--Removal of the metal bell mounted on a wooden pole (non-contributing – compatible) near the Shelton House.
--Planting of a row of pine trees along the western property border to screen houses from the trail. The park also allows native forest to grow up on the park side of the pine trees.
--Removal of the southern loop drive immediately south of the Shelton House. A portion of the drive is converted to a walking path to be used in conjunction with preparing an accessible route to the house. (PEPC 112127)
--In 2016 the witness elm tree on east side of the house is struck by lightning for a second time (the first strike occurring c. 2011) and is subsequently taken down.
--In 2024, the park contracts an archeological survey to locate unmarked graves associated with enslaved people at Rural Plains. Project uses archeological human remains detection dogs (AHRDD) and targeted geophysical survey to conduct non-invasive investigations. (PMIS 315118)
--A birdhouse is installed in March 2026. (PEPC 132442)

Uses

Functions and Uses:

Major Category	Category	Use/Function	Historic	Current	Primary
Agriculture/Subsistence	Farm (Plantation)	Farm (Plantation)	Yes	No	Yes
Agriculture/Subsistence	Horticulture Facility	Horticulture Facility	Yes	No	No
Defense	Battle Site	Battle Site	Yes	No	No
Domestic (Residential)	Single Family Dwelling	Single Family House	Yes	No	No
Education	Interpretive Landscape	Interpretive Landscape	No	Yes	Yes
Landscape	Leisure-Passive (Park)	Leisure-Passive (Park)	No	Yes	No
Landscape	Natural Area	Forest	Yes	Yes	No
Recreation/Culture	Outdoor Recreation	Outdoor Recreation	No	Yes	No

Public Access:

Public Access: Other Restrictions

Public Access Narrative:

All units of Richmond NBP are closed from sunset to sunrise daily and all day on Thanksgiving Day, December 25, and January 1, but there are no gates, fences, or admission fees restricting public access to public roads, parking lots, and the trail system. The Shelton House is open during limited hours.

Associated Ethnographic Group

Ethnographic Study Status: No Survey Conducted

Ethnographic Narrative:

Authors of this CLI update consulted with David Goldstein, Ph.D., Tribal and Cultural Affairs Lead, NPS, DOI-Region 1. No ethnographic study of Chickahominy Bluff, nor the Richmond NBP, has been conducted. The park currently consults with following Federally Recognized tribes: Delaware Nation, Catawba, Chickahominy East, and Pamunkey.

Analysis & Evaluation of Integrity

Analysis and Evaluation of Integrity Narrative Summary:

The historic integrity of Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is evaluated by comparing landscape characteristics and features present during the period of significance, ca. 1725-1932, with the existing conditions as assessed in 2023. Many landscape characteristics and features from the period of significance remain today. Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains represents an integral component of General Ulysses S. Grant's attempts to breach the Confederate defenses and move on to Richmond. Here, Union troops attempted to cross Totopotomoy Creek, which was strongly defended by Confederate forces entrenched on the west side. The historic character of the Rural Plains landscape is reflected in the remaining landscape characteristics and features: natural systems and features, spatial organization, land use, topography, vegetation, circulation, buildings and structures, views and vistas, small-scale features, and archeological sites. Contributing features include the Shelton House and corn crib; the Entrance Drive, Pear Lane, Farm Lanes, and the trace of the former alignment of Studley Road; large shade trees and ornamental vegetation around the Shelton House; Federal earthworks, agricultural berms and ditches, and banks along Pear Lane; and cemetery headstones and commemorative markers. These landscape patterns and their surviving features continue to convey the significance of the landscape as a battlefield and as a physical record of eighteenth and nineteenth-century architecture and agricultural practices.

The significance of Rural Plains as the site of the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek is conveyed through the extant Shelton House, which appears much as it did at the time of the battle. The house was used as headquarters for General Winfield Hancock and as a Union signal station, suffering significant damage from Confederate shells as members of the Shelton family sheltered in its basement. The spatial relationships between the house, Studley Road, Totopotomoy Creek, the extant open fields, and the landscape's topographical landforms help foster an understanding of the events of the battle and the challenges faced by the Union Army as it tried to cross the creek. The significance of the battle is further conveyed through the visible remains of the Union earthworks, which at the time of the battle cut across the property from Studley Road to Totopotomoy Creek south of the house. Of the approximately 3,000 feet of earthworks dug by the Union troops within the current property boundary, about half remain discernible today; the remainder was plowed over during previous agricultural activities. The architectural significance of the Shelton House as an early eighteenth century brick dwelling is evident in the preserved architectural details, materials, and siting. Built in 1725, the house underwent periodic renovations during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, but alterations generally preserved the basic form and structure of the house. Today the Shelton House retains a high degree of integrity for the year 1864, exhibiting an exterior appearance consistent with what was depicted at the time of the battle. The historic layout and operation of the Rural Plains plantation is evident in the existing landscape characteristics, particularly the spatial organization, circulation, and topography. Historic field arrangement is revealed today in existing agricultural fields and one nursery stock area, as well as the hedgerows, berms, ditches, and farm lanes that continue to organize the landscape. Even in areas that have reverted to forest, topographical features and variations in forest vegetation reveal the former field extents. Pear Lane is likely a vestige of an early circulation system that provided field access and accommodated mobility through the plantation.

Since 1932, some landscape characteristics and features at Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains have changed and altered the character of the landscape. The Shelton House was once the nucleus of a complex of more than a dozen structures that provided living quarters, specialized facilities, and storage for the operation of the farm. The loss of historic buildings, including slave quarters, domestic outbuildings, barns, sheds, and other farming structures, has diminished the ability of the landscape to convey its historic spatial organization and the agricultural and domestic operation of the plantation. The establishment of the Rural Plains Nursery in 1927 and the conversion of many of the agricultural fields to ornamental plant production altered the character of the landscape. The reduction in the total area under agricultural cultivation has caused many of the former fields to revert to forest, reducing views and diminishing the feeling of openness that characterized the landscape during the historic period.

INTEGRITY

The National Register of Historic Places defines integrity as the ability of a property to convey its significance

through physical resources. The National Register program identifies seven aspects of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Retention of these qualities is necessary for a property to convey its significance; however, not all seven aspects must be present to retain integrity. The following evaluation is based on an ca. 1725-1932 period of significance for Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains.

Overall, Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains retains integrity of location, design, association, materials, and workmanship. The landscape retains the integrity aspects of location, design, and association, clearly exhibiting important spatial relationships between the house, creek, circulation system, topographical features, and Federal earthworks necessary to convey the site's significance. The aspects of materials and workmanship are exhibited in the Shelton House, as well as the topographical features that convey historic agricultural practices. However, these aspects are diminished by the loss of many of the structures, small-scale features, and agricultural fields that were present during the historic period. The aspect of feeling has been diminished by the loss of historic views and open areas and the presence of ornamental nursery stock fields. Although the setting remains largely rural, it is diminished by the predominance of forested land and the development of suburban neighborhoods in proximity to the park unit.

The next section presents an analysis of landscape characteristics and their associated features and corresponding Historic Structures Inventory names and numbers, if applicable. It also includes an evaluation of whether the feature contributes to the property's National Register eligibility for the historic period (1725-1932), contributes to the property's historic character, or if it is noncontributing, undetermined, or managed as a cultural resource. If a feature is non-contributing, it is evaluated as "compatible" (visually congruent with the historic character of the landscape) or "incompatible" (visually incongruent with the historic character of the landscape).

Landscape Characteristic:

This section presents an analysis of landscape characteristics and their associated features and corresponding List of Classified Structures names and numbers, if applicable. It also includes an evaluation of whether the feature contributes to the property's National Register eligibility for the historic period (1725-1932), contributes to the property's historic character, or if it is noncontributing, undetermined, or managed as a cultural resource.

Landscape Characteristic: Natural Systems and Features

Historic and Existing Conditions:
Natural systems and features are the natural aspects that have influenced the development and physical form of the landscape, and can include geology, geomorphology, hydrology, ecology, climate, and native vegetation. Totopotomoy Creek, which serves as the western and southern boundary to the property, and which factored heavily as a natural barrier at the time of the battle, appears in much the same alignment as it followed historically (Figure 14). During the twentieth century, the Sheltons are thought to have dredged the creek to deepen the channel. Excessive flooding of the channel occurred due to Hurricane Gaston in 2004, and likely caused bank erosion and other changes to the stream bed. (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: 22)

Little is currently known about cultural treatment of wetlands during the period of significance. It is likely that livestock grazed freely in the areas less suitable to crop cultivation, which would have included the ravines and creek bottomlands. Livestock foraging typically results in bank erosion. Evidence of bank erosion is visible near Studley Road, and the creek has been tested and found to contain high coliform counts, possibly related to ongoing livestock access or development upstream of the property. Livestock grazing, as well as deer browse, has also affected the vegetation communities associated with the wetlands area and other parts of the property.

The native woodlands of mixed hardwood and Loblolly pine have undergone the greatest amount of change during Shelton family occupation of the property. As the Michler map and historical research has indicated, the 1864 landscape was in extensive agricultural production and much less forested than the contemporary landscape. Tobacco farming was particularly land-intensive, and much of the arable land would have been cleared for crop fields. Woodlands were limited to steep slopes or areas that were otherwise unsuited to agriculture. This is supported by the Michler map, which indicates that only the ravine areas along the creek bottom remained in woodland at the time of the 1864 battle. Three agricultural fields formerly located within the southern half of the property have reverted to pine-dominated woodland, while other steeply-sloped areas are forested with a mix of hardwoods and pine. The oldest trees cored in the woodland areas were a 118-year-old sweetgum, a 122-year-old American beech, and a 49-year-old loblolly pine, indicating that, although some may occupy the same location, few, if any, of the existing trees were present at time of the battle (Figure 15).

Naturally occurring vegetation on the property is consistent with the oak-hickory-pine forest vegetation community described by A.W. Kuchler in 1964 as characteristic of the southeastern United States. Kuchler's plant community models identify the potential for specific plant associations to occupy regions around the country prior to European settlement. The region within which the Totopotomoy Creek Unit falls was likely dominated by stands of both pines and hardwoods, as well as mixtures of the two.

European settlement resulted in the clearing of many formerly forested areas, and the depletion of soil. Woodlands were used to forage livestock, resulting in less layered and complex plant communities. Abandonment of many former agricultural fields during World War II led to rapid colonization by pines and other fast-growing invaders. Hardwoods have grown up beneath the pines, and their growth and dominance has been favored by fire suppression practices. The understory exhibits evidence of past degradation of the soils by agriculture, and diminished biodiversity. Invasive species, and the loss of such forest dominants as the American chestnut have also contributed to the substantive changes to forest composition since early European settlement.

Evaluation:
In general, the Totopotomoy Creek Unit retains the complement of natural features and systems present at the time of the battle, including its hydrologic patterns of intermittent drainages, Totopotomoy Creek, and seeps, as well as examples of native plant communities and soils. Woodland conditions along ravines gesture to the site's historic character, but forest growth in former agricultural fields does not.

Landscape Features:

Feature Name	CLI Feature ID	Feature Contribution	CRIS-HS Resource ID	Associated CRIS-AR ID	FMSS Record Type	FMSS Record Number	FMSS Exact Match
Totopotomoy Creek	174374	Contributing					No
Ravine Woodlands	174744	Contributing					No
Upland Woodlands	174376	Noncontributing – Compatible					No

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 14. View of Totopotomoy Creek looking east. (Richmond NBP, 2026)



Figure 15. Wooded areas in the southern portion of Rural Plains are once agricultural fields. (OCLP, 2023)

Landscape Characteristic: Spatial Organization

Historic Condition:
Spatial organization is the three-dimensional organization of physical forms and visual associations in a landscape, including the articulation of ground, vertical, and overhead planes that define and create spaces. The spatial organization of Rural Plains before the 1930s are poorly understood. Civil-War-period maps lack detail, indicating only the approximate location of the house, fields, and woodlands. The best sources for information about the layout of the plantation at the time of the battle are the soldiers' descriptions and the 1864 sketches by Alfred Waud. The drawing of the house and surrounding areas appears to show the house in its present configuration, with a row or cluster of buildings to the west of it. Another structure is visible on the right side of the sketch, appearing to indicate that it was located east or southeast of the house, however the sketch lacks sufficient detail to determine the exact layout of the house and its outbuildings.

The Shelton House was mentioned in several soldiers' accounts of the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek, describing it as a "large brick house" located on the ridge above the creek. The presence of outbuildings to the rear of the Shelton House was also noted in the account of Augustus C. Brown, who described a "semi-circle of negro quarters" of frame and log construction located between the Shelton House and the Union Earthworks to its west. If the structures depicted in the Waud sketch were indeed located between the house and the earthworks, a span of approximately 130 feet, they would have been arranged in a tight cluster, quite close to the house. The area in and around this cluster would have been heavily used for domestic and utility functions, resulting in a surface of compacted earth and little vegetation. (Brown 1906: 58)

Soldiers' accounts also noted the presence of the fence around the Shelton House at the time of the battle. As soldiers moved through the yard to the rear of the house, they disassembled the palings of the fence to ease movement through the yard. According to one account, the "men on the skirmish line knocked the palings off the garden fence to pass through…," the components of which were likely used for reinforcement in the construction of the defensive earthworks (one account specifically mentions the use of stacked fence rails in earthwork construction near the vicinity of the Shelton House). Recent archeology has found evidence of a fence located just to the southeast of the house in the form of two post-holes, indicating the location of fence posts near the current driveway. (Charles Storke Memoir; AOA 2009: np)

Beyond these spare details, a conjectural picture of the layout of Rural Plains may be developed based on typical organization characteristics of plantations of the period. During the mid-nineteenth century, the area about the house would have been a well-ordered collection of buildings and structures connected by fencing, paths, roads, and gardens. The front of the house, where guests would arrive, would likely have reflected a more formal character, featuring a fence that enclosed a yard, with a gate to mark the entrance and a path leading to the front door. The service and domestic landscape would have been less prominently located, behind or to the side of the house. These areas would have contained slave quarters and associated gardens, a kitchen garden, fruit and nut orchards, paths and roads, and fenced work yards.

The organization of the agricultural fields would have been primarily orthogonal, but they would have conformed to topography, resulting in some curved edges or irregularly shaped fields. Field size, location, and layout would have varied over time as the types of crops grown in them varied. By the early twentieth century, the plantation transitioned portions of its agricultural land to ornamental nursery production, although it appears that large fields were retained for continued agricultural production. As the twentieth century progressed, hedgerows of ornamental plants and trees, either established intentionally or resulting from overgrown horticultural fields, began to grow up between and around the fields, and former agricultural fields were left to revert to woodland.

Post-Historic and Existing Conditions:
Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is generally organized on a central level upland area occupied by the Shelton House and domestic precinct, surrounded by a patchwork of open fields

and forest edged by sloped drainageways that feed into Totopotomoy Creek. The property is bordered on the north by Studley Road and on the east by the Shelton Pointe subdivision.

The Shelton House domestic precinct is sited on the most level and generally highest portion of the upland knoll along Studley Road. The house is aligned orthogonally with Studley Road, with its front facade facing east. The house sits in a long rectangular yard about 80 feet wide north to south and stretching in front (east) of the house for about 180 feet and behind (west) of the house for about 80 feet. The front yard is a sward of turf grass with tall specimen trees and scattered shrubs, primarily around its edge. The northern side of the front yard is bounded by a tall boxwood hedge, while the east and south sides of the front yard are defined by boxwoods, trees, and hedgerows of nursery stock (Figure 16). The back yard is smaller than the front and is similarly bounded by ornamental vegetation and hedges. An entrance drive passes through both the front and back yard in a curving U-shape.

To the southeast of the house, across the entrance drive, is a narrow U-shaped space edged on three sides by large boxwoods (Figure 17). The boxwoods form a clearly defined outdoor room, the purpose of which is not currently clear. Southwest of the house separated by plantings is a mown field edged by thickets of dense shrubs, small trees, and tangled vines. The corn crib is located at the southeast corner of this field within a thicket of trees. A hardpacked earth spur road, faintly visible in the grass, leads from the entrance drive to the corn crib area.

The level knoll between Studley Road and the house precinct is predominantly an open field planted in rows of nursery stock, including English boxwood. The rows of shrubs occupy low, linear mounds of earth that follow a consistent east/west orientation. At the center of this field area, just north of the house, are a large chestnut tree and two tulip poplar trees. Six additional open fields of nursery stock edge the house precinct to the southeast, south, and southwest. Hedgerows of trees and shrubs and woodlands frame the open spaces of the fields. In between two of the fields are stands of larger shrubs and trees associated with the former nursery. The ornamental trees are generally planted in closely spaced rows on small linear mounds of earth.

To the east, south, and west of the house precinct, the property features six open agricultural fields on level terraces with farm lanes along their perimeters. The overall organization of the fields is orthogonal, however overgrown hedgerows, forest encroachment, and fields that conform to the topography of the site create a layout that is not strictly rectilinear. These farm fields are generally larger in size than the horticultural fields and are used to cultivate crops during the growing season. The remainder of the year, these fields are unvegetated.

The Pear Lane corridor extends south from the domestic precinct through the length of the property. It is currently used by the park as a pedestrian trail. The corridor provides access to several of the agricultural fields and continues through the woodland to the lower slopes of the property, crosses the utility corridor easement, and a modern footbridge spanning Totopotomoy Creek. Where Pear Lane edges the farm fields, there are often trees and shrubs between the road and the fields that offer glimpses into the adjacent open spaces. Woodlands overhang the southern section of the lane. A spur trail leads from Pear Lane into the wooded margin of the eastern field to provide access to the remains of Federal earthworks employed during the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek. The trail forms a narrow corridor through the woods. The earthworks form a linear edge to the trail. Much of the remainder of the property is wooded, obscuring the more steeply-sloped terrain of the intermittent drainageways that flow toward Totopotomoy Creek.

The western margin of the property consists of the floodplain of Totopotomoy Creek. Much of the low, marshy ground is obscured by dense vegetation. The stream corridor can be viewed from the wooden bridge crossing of the bottomland. Adjacent to the creek's floodplain to its north is a 120-foot-wide utility line corridor. A series of steel poles convey high tension electrical lines through the center of the space. The corridor is maintained in open vegetative cover through mowing by the power company to prevent interference with the lines from woody trees and shrubs. This allows for long views of the associated terrain.

Several important spatial relationships present in the landscape today reflect historic conditions and

help convey the significance of the site. These include the location of the house and its relationship to Studley Road, Pear Lane, Totopotomoy Creek, agricultural fields, and the Union earthworks. The overall arrangement of cultivated fields and the features that define them—terraces, berms, ditches, and hedgerows—reveal spatial patterns that likely date to at least the late nineteenth century, if not earlier. The visible remnants of the earthworks west and south of the house illustrate military practices provide information about the progress of the battle, and underscore the peril that the Shelton family endured as they sheltered in the basement of the house.

Evaluation:
Numerous features associated with the plantation at the time of the 1864 battle, including slave quarters, barns, outbuildings, fences, orchards, circulation features, and small-scale agricultural and domestic features, are no longer present, and for the most part their locations have not yet been determined. This diminishes the ability of the site to convey the spatial and functional relationships of a working antebellum plantation.

Since the battle, almost half of the lands that were in agricultural production— approximately forty to eighty-five acres—have since reverted to woodland. These formerly open areas were important during the battle because they afforded views of the surrounding terrain and allowed for the establishment of defensible lines of infantry and artillery and an associated field of fire. The loss of important views due to the encroachment of trees and other vegetation obscures the role of the Shelton House as a signal station.

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 16. The front yard of the house is defined on the north side by a boxwood hedge. The spatial organization of Rural Plains is strongly ordered by linear features like hedges, hedgerows, field edges, and roads. (OCLP, 2023)



Figure 17. South of the house, an outdoor room enclosed on three sides by boxwood hedges has been removed. (Richmond NBP, 2026)

Landscape Characteristic: Land Use

Historic Condition:
Land uses are the principal activities in a landscape that form, shape, and organize the landscape as a result of human interaction. Agriculture in one form or another has been the primary land use at Rural Plains from its first settlement in the eighteenth century to the transfer to the NPS in 2006. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hundreds of acres of cultivated fields were dedicated to the production of tobacco, grains, vegetables, hay, fodder, and orchard fruit. Tobacco had increased in economic importance throughout the seventeenth century, and by the time Rural Plains was settled, it was the most important export crop of Virginia. By the early eighteenth century, however, falling tobacco prices compelled farmers to increase production by clearing and cultivating ever more land. Crops were rotated through the fields as the soils were depleted, a practice that required a large amount of open land. Labor was provided initially by indentured servants, who served a predetermined period of time in return for passage to the Colonies, and increasingly in the eighteenth century by African slaves. (Kulikoff 1986: 95)

Plantations were self-sufficient, supporting all necessary services on-site, including production of market crops, growing of subsistence food, pasturing livestock, processing building material, and providing all domestic facilities for the family and the servants. Primary market crops through the antebellum period included corn, sweet potatoes, wheat, watermelons, oats, hay, tobacco, Irish potatoes, peaches, apples, hogs, and beef cattle. In addition to the larger crop fields, a kitchen garden would have been associated with the main house to provide food and herbs for the family. The enslaved may have had their own kitchen gardens associated with their quarters. Orchards would have provided apples, peaches, pears, and other fruit, primarily for cider production and animal fodder, although as the nineteenth century progressed fruit would have been increasingly bound for the market as edible fruit. Other land uses that supported the operation of the plantation may have included a mill thought to have been located on or near the property during the eighteenth or early nineteenth century, and a brick kiln that would have generated the construction materials used to build the Shelton House.

After the Civil War, economic hardships associated with Reconstruction and the loss of slave labor to work the fields impacted to productivity of Rural Plains, and production of all crops decreased from antebellum levels. In the early twentieth century, large-crop production of hay, corn, and wheat was augmented by smaller-scale truck farming of products such as potatoes, artichokes, watermelons, and cantaloupes sold to markets in Richmond and elsewhere. Crop diversity increased, while the total amount of land cultivated decreased. The reduction of cultivated land and its reversion to woodland continued throughout the twentieth century, so that by the 1960s, much of the formerly open field area was forested. In 1927, William R. Shelton and his wife Maud started Rural Plains nursery, and many of the agricultural field were converted to the cultivation of ornamental nursery stock.

Commemoration of the Civil War began in 1925, when two Freeman markers documenting important locations associated with the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek were placed along Studley Road. In 1932, a commemorative marker was placed along Studley Road by the APVA conveying the significance of the property to passersby. Gravestones associated with the Shelton family burial ground located in 2009 on the property date to the 1850s, indicating they were present at the time of the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek. Others that may have been moved to Hollywood Cemetery or otherwise removed are now missing. Other historic land uses include military battlefield and operations headquarters during the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek in 1864. The property was used as a girls' school from about 1835 until sometime in the 1840s.

Post-Historic and Existing Conditions:
Current land uses indicated on the property include agriculture, cemetery, interpretation/museum/education, recreation, undeveloped open space, and utility. Agriculture has been practiced continuously at Rural Plains for three hundred years, continuing today through partnerships with local farmers. Six crop fields totaling 24.2 acres are currently leased to a local

farmer and used for the cultivation of crops. These fields are vestiges of a more extensive system present during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Figure 18).

The Rural Plains property is historically thought to have included at least two, and possibly three, burial grounds. In October 2009, the NPS discovered evidence of one of these burial grounds in a hedgerow southwest of the Shelton House. The site currently includes two headstones and one footstone, with burial dates of 1855 and 1856 noted. Historic documentation suggests that many family graves were relocated to Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery in 1952. It is likely that the property included both a slave cemetery and an earlier family cemetery. It is unknown if or how many human remains are present at Rural Plains today.

The Totopotomoy Creek Unit is currently open to the public, who are welcome to explore the grounds and for special events and programs such as annual living history demonstrations and house tours, and walking tours on the anniversary of the battle. Pear Lane has been adapted by the NPS as a walking trail that connects the Shelton House precinct with other parts of the property and the Wysor tract and Bell Creek residential subdivision south of Totopotomoy Creek. A spur of the trail provides access to Civil War earthworks for visitors. These trails are accessible year-round.

Paralleling Totopotomoy Creek is a utility line corridor established around 1995. It is associated with high tension electrical lines maintained by Dominion Virginia Power. Wooden utility poles also parallel Studley Road along the northern margin of the property. There is an underground gas and another cable line along the northeastern property boundary. Drinking and irrigation water associated with the property has traditionally been supplied by wells on the property.

Evaluation:
Continued agricultural uses of Rural Plains helps convey the historical associations of the landscape and contribute to its historical integrity. All other current land uses are noncontributing. The full extent of the Cemetery is unknown, and there may be others on the property.

Landscape Features:

Feature Name	CLI Feature ID	Feature Contribution	CRIS-HS Resource ID	Associated CRIS-AR ID	FMSS Record Type	FMSS Record Number	FMSS Exact Match
Cemetery Site	174380	Undetermined					No

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 18. Several agricultural fields at Rural Plains are still leased by a local farmer for crop production. (OCLP, 2023)

Landscape Characteristic: Topography

Historic Condition:
Topography is the three-dimensional configuration of the landscape surface characterized by features (such as slope and articulation) and orientation (such as elevation and solar aspect). Modification of the landform at Rural Plains likely commenced at the time it was first settled. Areas would have been leveled for structures and cut and filled for roads. Agricultural fields were laid out on the most level areas, but these areas too would have been modified over time with repeated plowing and the construction of drainage ditches and berms around their perimeter.

The long history of agriculture at Rural Plains left its mark in the topography of the landscape. While forests replenish soil mass as vegetation dies and decomposes into organic matter, the vegetative mass in agricultural fields is removed during each harvest. Over time, this results in a slightly lower elevation in the fields than in adjacent forested areas. This process is compounded by erosion, as the bare soil of fields is blown away by winds or washed away by rains, collecting along the edges of the fields in berms.

Although many of the farm lanes and drives changed over time, it is believed that Pear Lane dates to a time early in the development of Rural Plains. The continual use of the lane caused it to become depressed in elevation with respect to adjacent land, likely through a combination of erosion from water and traffic and from intentional grading. Similar to the agricultural fields, the lane developed banks along its margins (Figure 19).

The construction and periodic alterations of Studley Road also involved land modification, including cut and fill, ditches, and berms. Prior to 1937, the Studley Road bridge crossing of the creek was

relocated 150 feet to the north of its current location. The road was realigned and straightened east of the bridge, resulting in modifications to the Totopotomoy Creek channel. Although the land west of the creek has recently been extensively regraded, it appears that the site of the original bridge remains visible within a clump of trees along the creek bank. Studley Road was again realigned between 1960 and 1965 when a segment of the corridor further to the east was straightened, which resulted in the construction of the semicircular pull-off to access the Freeman marker north of the Shelton property, and the high berm along the northern edge of the property. Abandoned segments of the old road bed are visible west of the entrance drive, as well as north of Studley Road.

Earthworks.
A primary line of Union earthworks shown on Civil War-period maps, and a secondary undocumented line, were developed in May 1864 through portions of the property. The earthworks were composed of an earthen parapet and rear ditch. Much of the line was reinforced with fence rails acquired on the Shelton property. Segments of the primary line survive east of Pear Lane and adjacent to a cultivated field south of the Shelton House. Erosion has diminished the original profile of the parapet and associated rear ditch, and woodland trees, shrubs, and vines are currently growing on sections of these earthen features. Long segments that once connected the existing portions, as well as additional elements that extended northwest past the Shelton House are no longer extant.

Portions of the earthworks that crossed agricultural fields were diminished by years of plowing. These earthworks are still clearly visible in the 1936 aerial photograph, but by the 1950s their presence is only indicated in aerial photographs by a faintly lighter line across the field. Near the Shelton House, Civil War military engineering maps indicate that a section of the line fell within the domestic precinct. The map suggests that the section included an artillery position, possibly a lunette or half-moon-shaped earthworks, where a “cluster of Coehorn Mortars [were emplaced] in the yard directly in front (west) of the house.” Historic mapping indicates another artillery position located southwest of the house, comprising a toothed line offset from the primary line. This position likely anchored the western flank of the line with powerful artillery. (Charles Storke Memoir)

At the time of the battle, the Shelton property was almost entirely under cultivation. Construction of the earthworks occurred in a relatively open landscape that afforded views and an expansive field of fire in all directions. The Shelton House, built on high ground within an upland plateau, offered commanding views of the surrounding countryside. The building was appropriated by Union troops as a signal station. The earthworks were built at the point at which the plateau began to fall away toward Totopotomoy Creek, known as the military crest, to ensure views would not be blocked by intervening terrain.

The earthworks were hastily constructed and appear to have supported a combination of artillery positions and infantry. The earth used to construct the fieldworks was revetted with logs and fence rails as noted in period accounts: “There was a pile of rails nearby, from which a company of Zouaves were helping themselves, using the rails to strengthen their trenches.” Typical of earthworks built for immediate use, these features included a rear ditch which allowed the soldiers stationed behind the parapet to improve their cover and concealment. The earthworks east of Pear Lane also include a series of traverses which could provide additional interior cover. The earthworks were designed to stand between 3 and 6 feet in height in locations where artillery was stationed, and two to five feet in height elsewhere. The combined width of the earthworks, including parapet and ditch, was between 12 and 15 feet. The earthworks were typically designed by an on-site military engineer trained in field fortification construction at programs such as those offered at West Point. The standard manual used by both Confederate and Union engineers at the time of the Civil War, “A Complete Treatise on Field Fortification with the General Outlines of the Principles Regulating the Arrangement, the Attack, and the Defence of Permanent Fortifications,” was developed by West Point professor Dennis Hart Mahan in 1836, and updated in 1845. Mahan was instrumental in advancing military engineering in the United States, particularly by introducing and interpreting European models. (Charles Storke Memoir)

A map prepared by James Chatham Duane, chief engineer of the Army of the Potomac, from an 1865 survey is one of the best sources of information regarding the location and configuration of

earthworks on the Shelton property available.

Post-Historic and Existing Conditions:
The Totopotomoy Creek Unit of Richmond National Battlefield Park is characterized by a broad upland plateau, edged by more steeply sloped landform associated by perennial and intermittent drainages. Along the property margin at Studley Road, there is a 4-foot-high cut bank created as part of the twentieth century realignment of Studley Road. The entrance drive cuts through the bank to access the property. The bank is slightly higher along the road margin, suggesting that some of the earth may have been placed atop the bank as part of the road realignment project.

The Shelton House precinct occupies high ground of the upland plateau at approximately 184 feet above sea level. To the south and west of the house, the land slopes gently for approximately one-quarter-mile before the elevation begins to drop more dramatically towards Totopotomoy Creek. The change occurs at an elevation of approximately 170 feet. All of the cultivated and horticultural fields are located on the upland knoll.

In contrast to the domestic areas and horticultural and agricultural fields in the northeast section of the property, the western and southern portions of the property contain moderately steep to steep slopes associated with Totopotomoy Creek and its tributaries and associated wetlands. Totopotomoy Creek is set at the lowest elevation on the property at approximately 95 feet.

Other topographic modifications in evidence on the property relate to agriculture and include drainage berms and ditches of unknown origin, and berms created for nursery stock that primarily date to the twentieth century. The berms edge the margins of several farm fields, and were likely established to control and manage storm water. In some cases, however, the berms may have resulted from erosion and plowing. Some of the fields are also edged by depressions constructed for field drainage and irrigation purposes. The berms in which nursery stock was planted are narrow parallel furrows typically oriented east/west, or north/south. All examples of landform and topography and topographic modifications on the property are in good condition.

Earthworks.
Portions of the Civil War earthwork systems associated with the 1864 Battle of Totopotomoy Creek are still evident. What had been continuous lines of earthworks at the time of the 1864 battle has devolved into broken segments of visible remnants through years of land modification and erosion. Within the Rural Plains landscape, three primary segments remain as tangible records of the fighting that occurred there.

The most visible section of extant earthworks extends east to west approximately 1,000 feet southeast of the Shelton House. This line features a two- to four-foot-high parapet and two- to three-foot-deep rear trench that extends for approximately 513 feet. The earthwork, including the trench and parapet, is approximately 16 feet wide. Several traverses, approximately 29 feet apart, extend perpendicularly to the rear of the parapet. The earthwork occurs at an elevation of approximately 175 feet, just above the point where the landform begins to drop away more steeply toward Totopotomoy Creek. The earthwork was designed to connect a series of high points along the brow of the property's upland plateau to afford views across the landscape and potential avenues of approach by Confederate forces. As illustrated on Civil War maps, the line once continued west and north toward the Shelton House precinct and across Studley Road. Much of the line to the northwest has been lost to agricultural plowing and erosion. The surviving eastern segment is in relatively good condition. Threats to the condition of the earthwork include large trees growing on the parapet and ditch, dead trees and tree and limb falls on the earthwork, and the presence of invasive plant species that have the potential to disrupt the native plant community that shields the earthwork from storm water. Leaf litter, which provides one of the best means of protecting earthworks against soil erosion, does not currently provide comprehensive cover for the soil profile of this earthwork.

A second segment of earthworks was discovered in late 2009 within a heavily wooded hedgerow edging the agricultural field directly south of the house. The NPS cleared hedgerow trees and invasive plant species to reveal the three-foot-high and eight-foot-wide parapet. It is now covered

with tall grasses and forbs and is trimmed annually to minimize woody growth (Figure 20). There are also several large animal burrows that have displaced portions of the parapet and ditch.

A third surviving segment of earthworks segment is located further to the south and extends across Pear Lane. It is associated with a line that does not appear on Civil War era mapping of the site, although it is visible on the 1936 and 1953 aerial photographs. The line is clearly visible in Lidar data collected in 2014. The segment measures approximately 1,100 feet in length and is three to four feet high and eleven feet wide. It includes a six-foot-wide rear trench. To the west of Pear Lane the line is difficult to discern, but to the east of Pear Lane the line continues nearly to the property boundary. At the far eastern end of the line are at least four individual rifle pits, two of which are located outside of the park boundary. During fieldwork conducted in February 2010, there was standing water in portions of the rear trench. This, as well as the trees growing on the earthwork, tree and limb falls, dead trees, and invasive plants constitute threats to the otherwise generally good condition of this line of earthworks.

Evaluation:
Today, the Rural Plains landscape documents the topographical record of nearly 300 years of agricultural and horticultural activity. Current fields, as well as former fields currently covered in woodland, are discernible by their topographic signature. The fields themselves are level and gently sloping, and slightly lower in elevation than the forested adjacent areas. Many of the fields are surrounded by low berms. Lidar data, collected for the Rural Plains site in 2015, reveals the topographical traces of fields south of the currently cultivated fields (Figure 21).

Confederate field fortifications were built to face the Union position to the south of Totopotomoy Creek in May 1864. The wooded slopes southeast of the bridge landing are crisscrossed with well-preserved Confederate entrenchments. The land that includes surviving earthworks is protected from development by a conservation easement associated with the Wysor property southeast of the Totopotomoy Creek Unit and falls within the authorized boundary of the park unit.

Landscape Features:

Feature Name	CLI Feature ID	Feature Contribution	CRIS-HS Resource ID	Associated CRIS-AR ID	FMSS Record Type	FMSS Record Number	FMSS Exact Match
Federal Earthworks Totopotomoy Creek	174386	Contributing	651465		Location	1737535	Yes
Agricultural Ditches and Berms	174382	Contributing	1168710		Location	1740647	No
Banks along Pear Lane	174384	Contributing	1168711		Location	1740437	No

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 19. Pear Lane, south of the Shelton House, features a sunken profile and raised berms along its edges. (Richmond NBP, 2026)



Figure 20. Wayside along west side of Federal earthworks, looking east. (Richmond NBP, 2026)

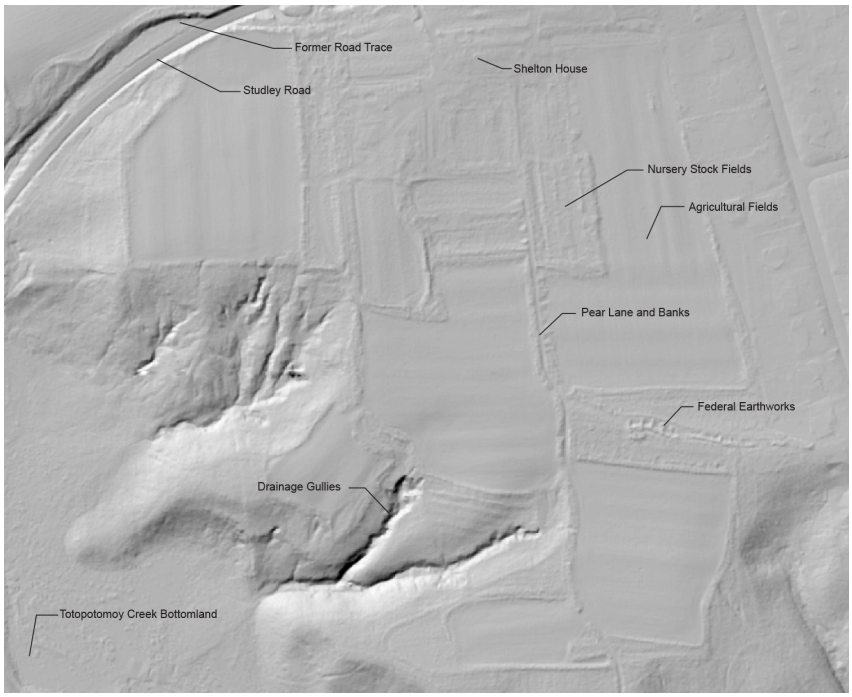


Figure 21. Detailed elevation data derived from Lidar reveal the location and layout of existing and former fields, roads, hedgerows, and earthworks. (OCLP)

Landscape Characteristic: Vegetation

Historic Condition:
Vegetation includes deciduous and evergreen trees, shrubs, vines, groundcovers, and herbaceous plants and plant communities, whether indigenous or introduced in the landscape. While no maps or photographs have been found that document the complexity of the Rural Plains agricultural landscape in 1864, the 1865 Duane map and the 1866-67 Michler map indicates patterns of land use and vegetation at a broad scale (see Figures 3 and 4). These maps depict a largely open landscape under cultivation, with wooded areas confined to the steepest slopes.

Large, open fields to the west of the Shelton House would have provided expansive views down to Totopotomoy Creek and of the opposite bank where the Confederate forces were entrenched. Two bands of woodland along the steep slopes to the south of the house formed a narrow open corridor between them that followed the level ridge down to the creek. The Union artillery earthworks were laid out to take advantage of the open views afforded by the agricultural fields.

The Michler map depicts a double row of trees located in the vicinity of the Shelton house. This may have been a symbol for an orchard near the house or for large shade trees associated with the house. The 1864 Waud sketch depicts a number of large trees around the house, although with a character that appears more informal and less ordered than the battle map suggests. The drawing identifies the trees behind the house individually as “buttontree” (sycamore), hackberry, mulberry, and locust. A 1936 Virginia Historical Inventory of the property described “the house…surrounded by a grove of beautiful locust, aspen [likely poplar], and sycamore trees.” (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: np)

The Cultural Landscape Study completed by Tonia W. Horton and Lauren F. Noe indicates that, in an interview, former property manager John Brooks related that locust trees were once present within the domestic precinct, but were removed by William Shelton, Jr. who did not like the trees. A series of stumps south of the house and entrance drive could be the remnants of these locust trees.

He also noted “tiger lily beds near the dwelling signify the former location of two large canopy trees as determined by a photographic comparison of the front yard in 1936 and current conditions.” Another large stump sits in the shrub border west of the rear entrance into the house. Despite the absence of these historic trees, existing deciduous canopy trees appear to convey an appearance similar to that present historically. (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: np)

Seven of the large trees in the domestic precinct were cored in 2007 to determine their approximate age. The species of the cored trees were hackberry, pecan, black walnut, American elm, American holly, Chinese chestnut, and sycamore. Of the trees that were cored, only the American elm, at 154 years of age, was positively determined to have been alive in 1864. Five of the trees produced incomplete cores, resulting in inconclusive age determination. Shelton family tradition maintains that the sycamore was present at the time of the battle and was damaged by a Confederate cannonball. (Abrams 2008)

Orchards.
Although none exist on the property today, “fruit tree orchards were historically an integral part of the plantation landscape,” both at Rural Plains and throughout the region as families relied on these trees for sustenance and sometimes sale of fruit for income. As documented in the Cultural Landscape Study, a recently discovered handwritten eyewitness account memoir of Walter M. Shelton, Edwin’s 15-year-old son at the time of the battle in 1864, specifically refers to “four fine orchards” on the property in 1864:
“One Apple orchard just across the main road and another across the swamp that leads to the ice pond. Just to the left of the back of the garden was a fine peach orchard. Higher up in the field was another fine peach orchard.”

Shelton mentions the destruction of the orchards by the Union soldiers as devastating:
“The next morning when I looked out I did not know the place. There was a line of fortification extending though the place….They used the fences, Houses, the fruit trees, plows, cultivators & all kind of farm implements….They left a few Apple trees on the road.” (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: np)

Despite this detailed description, it remains difficult to determine the specific location of these orchards, although the quote provides a starting point for further research. To the “left of the back of the garden” is presumed to mean to the south of the house. The apple orchard “just across the main road” is presumed to mean Studley Road, likely opposite of the house, which would place an orchard in the vicinity of the later overseer’s house on land beyond current NPS property. A third apple orchard “across the swamp that leads to the ice pond” is more difficult to place. This “swamp” likely means the wetland area along Totopotomoy Creek and its main tributaries. Given the possibility that the ice pond was associated with a tributary north of the overseer’s house, it is possible that this orchard would have been located further to the north in an area now in woodland and beyond park land. The fourth orchard, described as “higher up in the field,” could be a reference to the land northeast of the house, across Rural Point, which is higher in elevation.

Mr. Shelton recalled a visit by 1864 Union veteran Charles Storke in the late 1920s, who described helping to cut down an orchard on the property around the time of the battle. A 1928 “New York Times Magazine” article references “plum trees” behind the house in relation to the out kitchen, and the 1864 Waud sketch depicts a small tree that may be a fruit tree located just to the southeast of what is presumed to be the out kitchen. Archeological investigations may provide information about the location and species associated with these orchards.

The name of the farm road that leads from the house to Totopotomoy Creek, Pear Lane, also suggests that it once led to or traversed a pear orchard. The only reference to the use of this name to describe the road was made by former property manager John Brooks in a 2008 informal conversation, who noted there were once two pear orchards, or one pear and one apple orchard, located near the route. An undated Virginia Department of Transportation plat of the domestic precinct notes a sixteen-foot pear tree near the beginning of what is now the marked NPS trail that follows Pear Lane for much of its length. This may be a surviving element of one of the pear orchards thought to have existed near the lane. (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: np)

No orchards are apparent in the 1936 aerial photograph, although the regular plantings of ornamental nursery stock in place by that time may be difficult to differentiate from fruit orchards.

Agricultural Crops.
The exact size, configuration, and location of agricultural fields during the Civil War period is difficult to deduce from currently-available documentation of the property. Further research and investigation will be needed to determine more specific information about agricultural crops produced by the Sheltons and the fields used to grow them.

Information that is available about the productivity of the property includes the agricultural census of the mid- to late nineteenth century. For example, the 1860 census indicates the property included approximately 488 improved acres and produced 1,075 bushels of wheat, 2,000 bushels of Indian corn, and 5,709 pounds of tobacco, among other crops. (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: np)

Period accounts of the property provide conflicting insight into the crops grown in 1864. According to Civil War soldier Augustus Brown:
"... a point near Totopotomoy Creek, where we stacked arms in a road and a corn field of fifty acres, or thereabouts, and threw up earthworks for the artillery within two or three hundred yards of the enemy's line." (Brown 1906: 58-59)

In another account, Robertson included this description of Rural Plains in his diary:
"a short distance on we came to a large brick house on the left of the road with a large wheat field on the rear of it and a level ploughed field extending a half a mile towards Cold Harbor Road." (Walker and Walker 1965: 198)

The accounts suggest that the "level plowed field" extending to the south was recently tilled and did not noticeably contain growing plants at the time. Given that corn was typically planted in early April it would have already been recognizable by late May, even from a distance, and would likely have been more than knee-high by the time, suggesting that perhaps wheat was growing in the field (Usual Planting and Harvesting Dates for U.S. Field Crops).

It is possible that fields south of the house were planted in other crops, possibly including tobacco, which requires warmer temperatures of 75 to 80 degrees to germinate. Planting dates in coastal Virginia range from early to mid-May, depending upon the variety. Other crops that typically have a later planting date include summer fruit and vegetable crops, such as tomatoes, melons, sweet potatoes, and squash. Records recovered from the Shelton House indicate a routine of sowing and harvesting a variety of grains. Records found from 1864 in the Shelton Family Papers also show that Edwin Shelton was subject to a "Tax-in-Kind" for the "common defence [sic] and carry on the government of the Confederate States." This tax consisted of a ten percent "tithe" on Shelton's 450 bushels of corn and 3,000 pounds of cured fodder. (Usual Planting and Harvesting Dates for U.S. Field Crops; Cultural Landscape Study 2009: np)

After the Civil War, Rural Plains became less productive. As documented in the Cultural Landscape Study, the productive area of the property decreased to 400 improved acres by 1870 and produced 300 bushels wheat, 300 bushels Indian corn, and 2,000 pounds tobacco, significantly less than it had ten years earlier. By 1880 the farm was further reduced to 150 improved acres, including 30 acres (180 bushels) of wheat, 25 acres (450 bushels) of Indian corn, and 5 acres (3,500 pounds) of tobacco. Prior to 1927, large-crop production of hay, corn, and wheat was augmented by smaller-scale truck farming of products such as potatoes, artichokes, watermelons, and cantaloupes sold to Richmond Commission Markets such as T.W. Wood & Sons.

Beginning in the late 1920s, the family began to convert crop fields to commercial-horticulture uses, including the propagation of ornamental nursery trees and shrubs. The family operated the Rural Plains Nursery beginning in about 1927. The catalogue for the operation noted "Collectors and Growers of Rosebays, Hardy Broadleaf Evergreens, Conifers, Ornamental Trees and Shrubs, Peonies, and Bulbs," and "where quality and quantity combine." Specific plants indicated for sale in the catalogue include abelia, several azaleas, boxwood, cotoneaster, hawthorn, euonymus, holly,

mountain laurel, leucothoe, privet, mahonia, nandina, Andromeda, rhododendron, arborvitae, cedars, cypress, junipers, spruce, pines, cypress, yew, arborvitaes, hemlock, barberry, deutzia, forsythia, rose of Sharon, and hydrangea, among others. Given the number of boxwood currently present on the property, it is likely that the nursery began to specialize in the propagation of that species. Records indicate that the nursery supplied plant material to Colonial Williamsburg in 1930 as part of their garden restoration program. Although records do not currently confirm the extent, it is possible that the nursery also provided plant material for the many important garden restoration projects conducted in the area during the 1930s through the 1950s as part of the Colonial Revival garden movement in Virginia. Rural Plains was advertised as a source for "Flowers and Shrubs for Old Virginia Gardens from one of Virginia's Oldest Gardens." (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: np)

Woodlots.
Woodlots have traditionally been a part of the Rural Plains property since early settlement by the Sheltons. Woodlots were an important component of most farm properties, providing material for construction, firewood for fuel and cooking, and fence rails. The steepest slopes of the property likely remained wooded during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and served this purpose. The will of John Shelton II dated 1798 indicated that
"There being a sufficiency of land cleared with what I have directed my overseer to clear this winter to serve my beloved wife during her life, it is my desire and I do direct that no more of the land left is to be cleared after this winter but she shall be at liberty to get firewood and rail timber for the use of the plantation in fencing and firewood for the houses on the plantation."

As indicated on the Michler map, the ravines associated with the intermittent drainageways were wooded at the time of the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek. It is likely that woodlands were harvested during the twentieth century for saleable timber as part of the agricultural diversification attempted by the Sheltons to generate income from the property. There is evidence of Loblolly pine plantations having been planted on the property during the early to mid- twentieth century.

Kitchen Gardens.
Kitchen gardens were a common and necessary feature of the antebellum landscape. As noted in the Cultural Landscape Study, "Typically this garden would have included vegetable crops as well as fruit (and nut-bearing) trees requiring protection from grazing animals." Domestic gardens associated with Rural Plains at the time of the Civil War battle were most likely found within the area surrounding the main house and its associated outbuildings, particularly the area directly south of the house. At Rural Plains, the only elements of the kitchen garden that were documented in period accounts were the strawberries mentioned in Robertson's account:
"the men on the skirmish line knocked the palings off the garden fence to pass through and as a number of them stopped in the garden, I rode there to learn the cause, and found they could not resist the temptation offered by a large bed of ripe strawberries, and were busy eating them, unmindful of the bullets which were flying around." (Walker and Walker 1965: 198).

Other plants likely grown in the kitchen garden include vegetables, flowers, medicinal herbs, and some ornamental flowering shrubs, herbs, and bulbs, "a common practice beginning with the earliest colonial American domestic gardens." (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: np)

Ornamental Plantings.
The details of ornamental plantings at Rural Plains prior to the twentieth century are largely unknown. It was not uncommon, even in working landscapes, for families to beautify the area around the residence with large trees, shrubs, and flowering plants. Large trees, such as those depicted in the Waud sketch of the Shelton House, would have provided cooling shade to the house and yard in addition to their ornamental value. The Waud sketch also contains gestural marks that may indicate smaller trees or shrubs, as well as a structure that may be an arched trellis near the front walkway.

In the early twentieth century, Rural Plains began a transition from purely agricultural production to an ornamental nursery operation. The approximate date that the Rural Plains Nursery began operation is 1927, but the plantation likely began a transition before this in order to have sellable stock by the end of the 1920s. The sources for some of the original nursery stock may have come

from ornamental plantings already established on the grounds and around the house. In 1936, Rural Plains was documented by the Works Progress Administration as part of a Virginia Historical Inventory. According to the report,
"the house is surrounded by a grove of beautiful locust, aspen [likely poplar] and sycamore trees. The grounds at one time boasted some of the most beautiful boxwood in the state, but the ravages of war and scale destroyed all but two, which yet stand, one on either side of the old walk in front of the house." (WPA, Virginia Historical Inventory)

The wording suggests that the boxwoods predated the Civil War, but this cannot be independently confirmed. The report contains other details about the house and family history today believed to be erroneous, and it is likely that the report's source for all of the information was Mr. Shelton himself. It does suggest, however, that boxwoods and other ornamental plantings were part of the domestic landscape well before the nursery operation.

Photographs of the Shelton House indicate a shift in the treatment of plantings within the domestic precinct that may coincide with the evolution of the Rural Plains nursery. Early photographs indicate the presence of two spruce trees flanking the entrance into the house. The yard is dark and overhung by several large shade trees. Later photographs indicate shrub plantings along the foundation of the house including boxwood and roses, and a wider assortment of trees, both shade and flowering, and a brighter more open appearance. The plantings are consistent with the trend toward Colonial Revival landscape elements popular during the 1930s through the 1950s.

Post-Historic and Existing Conditions:
Today, the Rural Plains landscape is a mosaic of open spaces and forest cover, with approximately 60 percent of the property wooded. Over the course of the twentieth century, many of the property's former agricultural fields were converted to nursery use, allowed to go fallow and revert to woodland cover, or planted in Loblolly pine plantations. The margins of many fields and farm road corridors once colonized by hedgerows or thickets have since been removed. Six cultivated crop fields remain, while seven fields of nursery stock and one of two stands of densely-planted trees and shrubs associated with the former nursery have been removed. The NPS removed much of the invasive exotic plant species that were present within many of the hedgerows, woodlands, and fields.

Domestic Precinct.
The domestic precinct is edged to the north by a thick hedgerow. The western half of the hedgerow, which lies adjacent to the Shelton House, is comprised largely of boxwood while the eastern half contains a variety of specimen trees and shrubs associated with the Rural Plains Nursery, including American holly, heavenly bamboo (Nandina domestica), crepe myrtle (Lagerstroemia indica), firethorn (Pyracantha coccinea), aucuba (Aucuba japonica), and hydrangea (Hydrangea spp.). Otherwise, the house is edged by mown turf dotted with specimen trees, shrub and flower beds, and boxwood plantings. One of the planting beds features tiger lilies (Lilium philadelphicum).

Other plant species observed in association with the domestic precinct include Lebanon cedar (Cedrus libani), flowering dogwood, sweetgum, tulip poplar, magnolia (Magnolia sp.), Norway spruce (Picea abies), flowering cherry (Prunus spp.), sassafras (Sassafras albidum), camellia (Camellia spp.), euonymus (Euonymus japonicus), juniper (Juniperus communis), privet (Ligustrum vulgare, L. japonicum, L. sinense), mountain laurel, azalea (Rhododendron spp.), yew (Taxus sp.), daylilies (Hemerocallis spp.), iris (Iris spp.), and peonies (Paeonia spp.). Boxwoods line the residence and portions of the driveway. The cutting bed used by Mr. Shelton, Jr. for propagating boxwoods is visible to the north of the residence. South of the entry drive and at the entrance to Pear Lane is a 15-foot-high, 25-foot-long, three-sided, rectangular planting of boxwood. This rectangular planting first appears in the 1953 aerial photograph of the site. Although the purpose of the planting is not immediately clear, it may have served to showcase the plants and popular Colonial Revival garden features that the nursery promoted in its mid-twentieth century newspaper advertisements.

Many of the large shade trees around the house appear to predate the nursery operation, although

only the elm (approximately 154 years old in 2007) and the holly (approximately 127 years old in 2007) have been positively dated. Many of the trees are declining, including the elm, which is barely alive with only a fraction of its crown still alive. The sycamore is hollow and has lost its central leader, and it is now sprouting from its base. The large Chinese chestnut in the field north of the residence is said to have been planted by Mr. Shelton, Sr. to commemorate his 1915 marriage to Maud Elizabeth Greenlee (Figures 22 and 23).

Fields Associated with Former Nursery Operations.
Surrounding the house are a number of fields containing nursery stock associated with the operation of the Rural Plains Nursery. The most conspicuous of these are the boxwood fields, which feature rows of small boxwoods planted on long windrows of earth (Figure 24). The boxwood plants, primarily English (Buxus sempervirens 'Suffruticosa') and American (Buxus sempervirens) boxwood, are generally between one and two feet high and spaced about three feet apart, although due to many missing plants, the spacing is irregular. The health of more than half of the boxwoods is in decline, especially in the more exposed fields.

Other former nursery fields contain a wider variety of ornamental stock, including cherry (Prunus spp.), sugar maple (Acer saccharum), red maple (Acer rubrum), willow oak (Quercus phellos), redbud (Cercis canadensis), Russian olive (Elaeagnus angustifolia), forsythia (Forsythia x intermedia), spirea (Spiraea sp.), holly (Ilex spp.), China fir (Cunninghamia lanceolata), wax myrtle (Myrica cerifera), privet (Ligustrum spp.), yew (Taxus spp.), Leyland cypress (X Cupressocyparis leylandii), red-tip (Photinia fraseri), Southern magnolia (Magnolia grandiflora), crape myrtle (Lagerstroemia indica), flowering dogwood (Cornus florida), burning bush (Euonymus alatus), and arborvitae (Thuja occidentalis). Many of these plantings are overcrowded, have grown beyond the size intended for transplanting, or are being overrun by volunteer vegetation. Their conditions generally range from fair to poor (Figure 25).

Several hedgerows border fields and circulation features at Rural Plains. Some of these derived from ornamental plantings, either originally planted in a linear fashion or from the edges of ornamental stock fields that were not harvested. Other hedgerows originated in a more organic fashion along fencelines, ditches, field edges, roads, and other linear features, and are comprised of volunteer old field species and invasive species. Hackberry and mulberry are common, as are American holly, poison ivy, greenbrier, privet, multiflora rose (Rosa multiflora), tree-of-heaven (Ailanthus altissima), and Japanese honeysuckle. The hedgerows continue to order the landscape, marking the boundaries of current and former fields.

Agriculture.
Agricultural crop production continues to occur at Rural Plains due to an agricultural lease program. A local farmer with past experience working on the property is currently responsible for the fields. Today, six fields remain, and are located on relatively level terraces underlain by the property's best soils. Each is edged by a combination of hedgerows and woodlands. Crops recently grown in the larger fields have included corn, soybeans, and wheat.

Evaluation:
The majority of the cultural vegetation at Rural Plains is less than 100 years old and is associated with the Rural Plains Nursery operation, either as remnants of horticultural beds originally intended for sale at the nursery, vegetation planted in the grounds for ornamental purposes, or ornamental species that have naturalized in the landscape. Several of the specimen trees around the house predate the nursery operation, with at least one, the American elm, old enough to have been present at the time of the battle. Not all of the trees have been decisively aged, and other extant trees may have been present during the battle. These trees are not only possible witness trees, but they also represent ornamental or shade trees associated with the farm house in the period before the nursery operation, helping to reveal the character of the domestic landscape.

Landscape Features:

Feature Name	CLI Feature ID	Feature Contribution	CRIS-HS Resource ID	Associated CRIS-AR ID	FMSS Record Type	FMSS Record Number	FMSS Exact Match
Large Shade Trees at Shelton House	174388	Contributing					No
Ornamental Vegetation at Shelton House	174390	Contributing					No
Nursery Stock Fields	174394	Noncontributing – Compatible					No
Boxwood Fields	174392	Noncontributing – Compatible					No

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 22. Image of horticultural stock southwest of the Shelton House, showing the character of the large specimen trees and ornamental vegetation at Rural Plains. (OCLP, 2023)



Figure 23. The field north of the house contains naturalized narcissus, tulip poplar trees, and a large Chinese chestnut. (Richmond NBP, 2026)



Figure 24. View facing west at an example of a former boxwood field at Rural Plains. (Richmond NBP, 2026)



Figure 25. Ornamental nursery stock include camellias and crepe myrtle (left). (Richmond NBP, 2026)

Landscape Characteristic: Circulation

Historic Condition:
Circulation refers to the spaces, features, and applied material finishes that constitute systems of movement in a landscape. Since the early nineteenth century, Studley Road has been part of a primary circulation route across Hanover County. Rural Plains was located on this road, with the house and primary farm functions on the south side of the road and additional fields and orchards on the north side. William R. Shelton, Jr. recalled in an interview that Studley Road was formerly referred to as Tinsley Road for its association with the Tinsley family property, Totomoi, located just north of Rural Plains. His father is known to have worked on the construction of a former bridge over the creek associated with Studley Road, described as made of “iron with concrete side.” During the twentieth century, the road was paved with asphalt and edged with stone and concrete gutters in places. In the late 1950s or early 1960s, Studley Road was realigned between Totopotomoy Creek and the entrance to Rural Plains to create a more gradual curve more suitable for the speed of automobiles. (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: 42)

Circulation within the farm was accommodated by a combination of semi-permanent drives and more transient field access lanes that encircled cultivated fields. The latter provided cart and farm equipment access to the fields, and as the field size, location, and arrangement changed with changing crops and farming practices, the farm lanes changed with them. The primary circulation drives, however, would have persisted much longer, perhaps for the full history of the plantation.

From Studley Road, the house was accessed by a U-shaped entrance drive at least since the 1930s. At that time, the drive passed both north and south of the house, but at some later time the north portion became disused and circulation passed only around the south side of the house. It is not known when exactly this U-shaped drive configuration was established. The Michler map drawn in 1867 suggests a single entrance drive passed to the west, or rear, of the house, but as it would be unusual for the sole entrance drive to approach the rear of the house, the map may be either inaccurate or symbolic. Aside from the trace of the north portion of the U-shaped drive, which is

visible today, no documentary or archeological evidence has revealed any other configuration of the entrance drive.

Pear Lane, the long drive that passes from the southeast corner of the domestic precinct southward through the property to Totopotomoy Creek, also dates to the 1930s and perhaps well before. While not documented in Civil War-era accounts and mapping, the lane appears to have structured development of outbuildings and fields on the property since at least the nineteenth century. The route follows the ridge down the center of the property and would have provided primary access to the fields south of the house. Evidence of former nineteenth-century buildings has been located archeologically along the route, with possible evidence visible in 1930s aerial photographs. The name Pear Lane was used by Rural Plains caretaker John Brooks in a conversation with Toni Horton in April 2008, during which he attributed the name to a pear orchard that had been traditionally located along the road in the same location as the ornamental plantings, which are currently visible to the immediate east of the road southeast of the house.

Circulation patterns for large-scale agricultural landscapes are generally rectilinear in plan, reflecting vernacular field patterns for which they typically serve as borders and access. At Rural Plains, the network of farm roads and trails traversed would have been fairly extensive in historic conditions, dating to the agricultural uses of the site, from tobacco culture to large-scale production of corn, wheat, hay, and other crops. These roads served as conduits between fields and the main residence as well as connections between the various areas of the farm. Although not detailed on historic maps, crop fields would have had distinct boundaries, typically edged by fencelines, hedgerows, and farm lanes. With the advent of mechanized farm equipment, the use of these lanes as roads became more prevalent.

Post-Historic and Existing Conditions:
Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains is accessed by Studley Road (State Route 606), an asphalt-paved two-lane rural secondary highway, edged by grass- and concrete-lined ditches (Figure 26). Studley Road edges the property to its north, and crosses Totopotomoy Creek at the site's western edge. The road, which is in good condition, is lined by farms, woods, and medium-density residential subdivisions. The former alignment of Studley Road is visible extending to the west near the entrance into the property. An overhead utility line follows the trace.

The entrance drive is a 10-foot-wide horseshoe-shaped drive that forms a sweeping arc around the house, connecting the house precinct with Studley Road northwest and northeast of the house. The entrance drive is surfaced with gravel and hard-packed earth, and is generally in good condition. Grass is growing in the center of the drive in places. Gates composed of metal chains anchored and locked to metal posts are set approximately 20 feet inside the driveway entrance. A gravel parking area is located in the northeast corner of the property near Studley Road.

Traces of several farm lanes and road traces remain visible. A grass-surfaced road trace in good condition edges a hedgerow that parallels the house precinct to its north. It ends at a large cedar tree that sits adjacent to the eastern portion of the entrance drive. Other traces include farm lanes that lead to and around the farm fields. Lanes associated with currently cultivated fields continue to provide access for vehicles and farm equipment, while those associated with disused fields are less discernible in the landscape.

Pear Lane is a 10-foot-wide hard packed earth lane that extends south from the eastern segment of the driveway near the house precinct and continues to Totopotomoy Creek and associated bottomlands (Figure 27). It has been abandoned for use as a trail and rehabilitated at the point where it enters the woods to attempt to avoid further erosion and soil loss. The mulched trail is anchored with coir logs and debris to help slow water. The trail has been rerouted to be more sustainable. [Note: in 2015 the Virginia SHPO concurred with the NPS (through the CLI) that Pear Lane was a contributing feature; however, the 2018 National Register update evaluates the road as noncontributing. The 2023 recertification of the park's HSI also identifies Pear Lane as a contributing feature.]

An access road, surfaced with hard-packed earth and in good condition extends east from Pear

Lane just south of the northeastern agricultural field. This access road arises south of the lower section of the Union earthworks. A spur trail leads east from Pear Lane just south of the northeastern agricultural field. This narrow route is surfaced with hard-packed earth and leads to a line of remnant Union earthworks located in a wooded area near the eastern property line. The surface of the trail is uneven and includes vegetative growth. A social trail extends from the cultivated field to the south of the earthwork toward the Shelton Pointe residential subdivision. Another trail leads north from this path through a break in the earthwork toward the northeast crop field.

Evaluation:
Circulation features today continue to convey the organization and function of the domestic and cultural uses of Rural Plains. Contributing features that date to the period of significance include Studley Road, the entrance drive, Pear Lane, and farm lanes. In addition to these extant features, road traces that reveal former circulation features, including the trace of the former Studley Road alignment and the trace of the northern segment of the entrance drive along the north side of the house, also contribute to the cultural landscape.

Landscape Features:

Feature Name	CLI Feature ID	Feature Contribution	CRIS-HS Resource ID	Associated CRIS-AR ID	FMSS Record Type	FMSS Record Number	FMSS Exact Match
Studley Road Historic Road Trace	174404	Contributing	1168707		Location	1738603	No
Pear Lane	174402	Contributing	1168709		Location	1739173	No
Rural Plains Entrance Drive	174408	Contributing	1168706		Location	1738601	No
Rural Plains Agricultural Lanes	174400	Contributing	1168705		Location	1738599	No
Parking Area	174398	Noncontributing – Compatible					No
Contemporary Trails	174406	Noncontributing – Compatible					No
Social Trails	174396	Noncontributing – Compatible					No

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 26. View of Studley Road looking west, also showing the entrance to the park unit parking lot. (Richmond NBP, 2026)



Figure 27. A view of Pear Lane looking south. (Richmond NBP, 2026)

Landscape Characteristic: Buildings and Structures

Historic Condition:
Buildings are elements constructed primarily for sheltering any form of human activity in a landscape, while structures are elements constructed for functional purposes other than sheltering human activity. As was typical of working farms in Hanover County during the antebellum period, the landscape of Rural Plains contained numerous agricultural and domestic buildings and structures needed to support daily life for the Shelton family, their slaves, an overseer, livestock, and the complex farm operations that took place within the 600-acre property. At the time of the battle, the property was known to have included the brick dwelling house, at least one outhouse, an out- or summer kitchen, eight slave quarters, an overseer's house, barn, smokehouse, at least one tobacco barn, and probably a privy. Several of these structures were located within the domestic precinct, whereas others were likely located adjacent to fields and roads.

The Shelton House is believed to have been constructed between 1724 and 1726 based on dendrochronological evidence. John Shelton is known to have been in Hanover County, and possibly in the vicinity of Totopotomoy Creek, before that time, but it is not known whether a dwelling preceded the existing dwelling at Rural Plains.
An advertisement offering the property for sale in 1777 is one of the best sources of information available about the property during the eighteenth century. John Shelton and his wife Eleanor Parks Shelton, daughter of "Virginia Gazette" printer William Parks, posted a notice regarding the sale that indicated the size of the property as 600 acres, and the fact that it contained a brick dwelling with four rooms and a passage on the first floor, with the same above, as well as a cellar.

Later accounts of the property are primarily associated with the Civil War Battle of Totopotomoy Creek. Personal accounts suggest that the domestic precinct included a separate kitchen building located beneath a grove of plum trees 100 feet behind the main house, and a semi-circular arrangement of slave quarters located west of the house between the Union earthworks and the dwelling. Also thought to have existed was a wooden smokehouse possibly adjacent to the out-kitchen. This building may have survived on the property as late as the 1920s.

Damage incurred from the battle to the Shelton House remains visible today, particularly in the attic. Col. Edwin Shelton, owner of the property at the time of the battle, was a Confederate sympathizer. Although his family remained in the house during the battle, Colonel Shelton was stationed with the Confederates behind the opposing line of earthworks across Totopotomoy Creek. Although traditional accounts suggest that Shelton advised the Confederates to destroy his house rather than allow the Union army to prevail, it appears that Shelton requested that his house be spared. Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge is said to have told Mr. Shelton incorrectly that his family had left and that the house would be shelled to prevent Union use as a signal station. The family, however, is known to have remained hidden in the basement throughout the battle, but survived unharmed.

A sketch prepared in 1864 by Alfred Waud indicates the presence of five structures directly to the west of the house. Based upon later family accounts, these most likely included the out-kitchen, smokehouse, several of the slave quarters, and a larger structure that was possibly a small barn or other agricultural building along the westernmost edge of the cluster. At this time, the domestic precinct would also have likely included at least one outhouse and a well. The 1860 Slave Schedule of the U.S. Census recorded in Edwin Shelton as owning thirty-seven slaves and eight slave houses on the property. It is not known how many of the eight slave quarters were part of the semi-circle of structures described in later interviews with the family and property manager John Brooks. Archeological investigations have confirmed the presence of historical cultural features in this area. Testing identified possible living surfaces, a large eighteenth-century brick chimney or hearth feature, post holes, linear features, a rectangular feature, an irregular feature, possible refuse pits, and a circular feature. (AOA 2009: np)

An unidentified structure appears on the far right side of the Waud sketch. The orientation of this building does not correspond with that of the other buildings and it is awkwardly sited. The drawing

may indicate an attempt by Waud to include a building that was either slightly out of view or closer in the foreground without blocking what was in the distance. Aerials from the 1930s indicate that a structure may have been located in the vicinity, but given the poor image quality, archeological investigations are needed to confirm this.

Several other structures are believed to have existed on the property that are no longer extant. An overseer is indicated as associated with the property in 1782 records, and it appears that an overseer's house was located somewhere on the property during the eighteenth century. In 1874, a survey plat of the property indicates the presence of an overseer house across Studley Road; it is not known whether the earlier dwelling was sited in the same location.

During the eighteenth century, agricultural buildings would likely also have included tobacco barns used to cure tobacco after it was harvested, and a livestock barn. The 1777 advertisement mentions at least one barn and numerous "tobacco houses" being part of the historic landscape in the late eighteenth century. At the time of the 1860 census, the Sheltons are known to have produced 5,709 pounds of tobacco. The number of livestock recorded in the Agricultural Schedule, four mules, six milk cows, and two oxen, would have required at least one barn. An 1864 account refers to a "barnyard" having received artillery fire that killed several cows. A large barn is visible in aerial photography from the 1930s and 1950s. This barn housed mules that William R. Shelton Sr. used to maintain the county roads when he served as county supervisor in the 1910s.

A corn crib was a common feature of nineteenth-century farms and was likely to have existed on the property at the time of the battle. A building in the location of the extant corn crib appears in aerial photographs from the 1930s through the 1960s. A chicken coop and cider house may also have existed, but no specific references to either structure have been found. Lacking refrigeration, a root cellar was also a common feature of the mid-nineteenth century. However, it is also possible that the Shelton family stored their fruit and root vegetables in the large cellar of the main house.

A tenant house was also located on the property. Evidence of this structure was identified during the Archeological Overview and Assessment alongside one of the agricultural fields accessed from Pear Lane. No structural remains of this house exist aboveground. The roof of this structure is visible on the 1936 aerial photograph. The tenant house was likely a nineteenth-century postbellum addition to the agricultural landscape.

By the early twentieth century, the number of buildings was greatly reduced from its peak in the nineteenth century. In the 1936 aerial photograph, several buildings are visible clustered around the domestic precinct, including the house, barn, and corn crib, as well as five or six other small structures. Some of the building shapes in the poor-quality photograph are difficult to differentiate from trees, but other shapes are unmistakably rectilinear. The function of these structures is unknown, but would likely have had various agricultural purposes. Aside from the corn crib, which is extant, the last of these to be removed was an open-sided garage located immediately to the west of the corn crib, around 2011.

Post-Historic and Existing Conditions:
Shelton House.
The Shelton House is an eighteenth-century brick dwelling listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register and National Register of Historic Places as a significant example of early Colonial Virginia vernacular architecture (Figure 28). The dwelling is a substantial rural Virginia farmhouse representative of the rising Hanover County gentry of the 1720s. The five-bay, 1-1/2 story gambrel roof structure features dormer windows, brick laid in a Flemish bond with glazed headers, and an unusual porch chamber above the entrance. As noted in a 2004 Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) update, "The exterior walls are loadbearing, made of bricks laid in a Flemish bond pattern above and below the beveled water table. Glazed headers, as well as the rubbed bricks placed in the jack arches and jambs of the first floor windows and on the corners, provide ornamentation that is both structural and decorative in nature. The appearance of Flemish bond with glazed headers in dwellings of early Virginia was an indication of the builder's wealth and taste, a choice that proliferated until the mid-eighteenth century." (Historic American Buildings Survey)

The interior of the dwelling has a double-pile arrangement composed about a central passage, and is two rooms deep on both the first and second floors. The rooms in the front are associated with the public realm and are deeper than those in the rear. Due to the gambrel roof, there are four rooms of usable size on the second floor. The chimneys, which appear original, are placed inside the end walls, allowing for the construction of corner fireplaces in each of the four rooms downstairs. There is also a hearth fireplace in the basement and a corner fireplace in a back room, and two covered fireplaces on the second floor. A narrow stairway in the rear of the house provides access to the second floor, although this is not original. The basement contains one large room, most recently used for storage. During the antebellum period, a center hall was removed to create a large dining room. The space was used as a shelter for members of the Shelton family during the 1864 Battle of Totopotomoy Creek. There are several other rooms in the basement whose historic functions have yet to be determined. As with the stairway, recent material investigation has pointed to the reconfiguration of both the basement walls and the first floor hall.

The HABS update also indicates the following:
“While the rear, wood-frame porch is a later addition, the house always had a front porch that supported a small chamber above. The porch chamber is integral to the house, evidenced by the framing, and it is possible that the first-floor porch was enclosed originally given the presence of beaded boards and tapered columns. Nonetheless, the porch and porch chamber room arrangement was an early attempt by colonial Virginians like the Sheltons to establish social distance, creating an intermediate space between the front door and the internal rooms of the hall and chamber wherein guests both invited and unexpected could be received without intruding on the family. This echoed in part the function of the central hall; Rural Plains is unusual in that it had both from the beginning.”

Architectural historians currently date the structure to 1724-1726 based on dendrochronological analysis conducted on timber rafters that suggested the year in which they would have been cut for construction. The house appears to have been renovated in 1784-1785, circa 1835-1845, and again in the early twentieth century to accommodate indoor plumbing. Much of the interior trim dates to the circa 1835-1845 Greek revival-style improvements.

Corn Crib.
The corn crib, located southwest of the house, is a single-story structure, approximately 12 feet by 14 feet (Figure 29). The structure is set on brick piers located at the corners and beneath the door. Beams are supported by the piers, and in turn support joists that are nailed to 4-by-4-inch posts set approximately 24 inches on center. The siding is comprised of boards nailed horizontally to the posts, with space left between them to allow air to circulate. The gable roof is clad with standing-seam metal. The gable end faces the front entrance, marked by a single 2-foot-wide wooden plank door hung by metal hinges. The door is set 1-1/4-feet above the ground. The gable end of the structure is sided with boards that completely fill the space. The structure is in poor condition.

Totopotomoy Creek Bridge.
An approximately 400-foot-long wooden bridge spans Totopotomoy Creek at the site’s southern boundary (Figure 30). The current bridge was built around 2005 after an earlier footbridge was destroyed by the 200-year flood event caused by rain associated with Hurricane Gaston in August 2004. The structure links the Totopotomoy Creek Unit with the adjacent Bell Creek residential subdivision and the Wysor tract that contains surviving evidence of the Confederate positions on the ridge south of the creek. The 6-foot-wide bridge is composed of 8-foot-long, 2-by-6-inch wood planks edged by 4-by-6- inch, 8-foot-long timbers bolted to wood blocks placed approximately every 6 feet along either edge of the bridge to protect pedestrians and any maintenance vehicles that might use the structure from going over the side. The structure, which is in good condition, rests at either end on concrete blocks set into the ground. The northern end of the bridge is sloped, while the remainder is level as it crosses the creek and associated floodplain.

Power Line Poles.
East of Totopotomoy Creek is a 120-foot-wide utility corridor associated with a high-tension electrical line maintained by Dominion Virginia Power (Figure 31). Groups of three approximately 40-foot-high steel poles convey the electrical lines. The poles are placed approximately 1,100 feet

apart. The utility line was established around 1995.

Pit Toilet.
This contemporary restroom was erected in the parking lot area in 2024. It is painted brown to better blend in with the surrounding landscape.

Evaluation:
Buildings and structures at Rural Plains include the Shelton House and corn crib, as well as a contemporary wooden footbridge over Totopotomoy Creek, power lines, and a restroom.

Landscape Features:

Feature Name	CLI Feature ID	Feature Contribution	CRIS-HS Resource ID	Associated CRIS-AR ID	FMSS Record Type	FMSS Record Number	FMSS Exact Match
Shelton House (Rural Plains)	174416	Contributing	651113		Location	101758	Yes
Rural Plains Corn Crib	174410	Contributing	1168708		Location	1623985	No
Totopotomoy Creek Footbridge	174414	Noncontributing – Compatible					No
Power Line Poles	174412	Noncontributing – Compatible					No
Pit Toilet	210821	Noncontributing – Compatible					No

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 28. A view of the Shelton House looking west. (Richmond NBP, 2026)



Figure 29. A view of the corn crib looking south. (Richmond NBP, 2026)



Figure 30. View of the Totopotomoy Creek footbridge looking south. (Richmond NBP, 2026)



Figure 31. A view showing the high tension power lines and poles along the south edge of the Rural Plains property. (OCLP, 2023)

Landscape Characteristic: Views and Vistas

Historic Condition:
A view is the expansive and/or panoramic prospect of a broad range of vision that may be naturally occurring or deliberately contrived. A vista is a controlled prospect of a discrete, linear range of vision, which is deliberately contrived. Expansive views of the surrounding landscape were a critical feature of the antebellum landscape. Views to the west and south encompassed Totopotomoy Creek, and during the battle, the Confederate positions to its south. Views to the east also provided a good prospect of the Shelton family landholdings, which extended over several hundred acres. As stated in the Cultural Landscape Study, battle period maps,
"depict extensive views in all directions, a factor undoubtedly key to the establishment of a Union signal station atop the roof of the residence and to the siting of earthwork alignments in the cultivated fields to counter Confederate fire." (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: np)

As one account of the battle recalled:
"The works seen from this point consist of a double row of rifle-pits on the crest above the stream called Totopotomoy, with epaulements for guns, not more than 600 yards away. The guns, flags, and men are distinctly visible from this mansion." (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: np)

A drawing by Alfred A. Waud looking west from the second story window of the Shelton House on the day of the battle reinforces these descriptions, depicting Union soldiers in a field planted in what appears to be shoulder-high wheat or hay, engaging the clearly visible Confederate line across the creek in the background.

Troops on the ground later recalled that the land behind the house sloped toward Totopotomoy Creek, and that Confederate troops were easily visible beginning at approximately 600 to 800 yards away. By describing the Confederate lines as within easy sight of the Union position at the Shelton House, these accounts, as well as the image from Harper's Weekly, indicate that there was a direct line of sight between the Shelton House and the opposite side of Totopotomoy Creek uninterrupted

by trees or other vegetation.

Post-Historic and Existing Conditions:
Today the open and expansive views no longer exist due to successional woodland growth that has encroached upon the agricultural fields and hedgerows. Ornamental vegetation around the house further limits these views. Views to the east from the horticultural and agricultural fields, while not as critical from a military perspective, survive to some degree but are encroached upon by the nearby Shelton Pointe residential development. Views to the north across Studley Road that were open fields at the time of the battle are now obscured by woodland, but have not been developed as residences.

From Studley Road, glimpses of the Shelton House are afforded in a few isolated locations. A berm that parallels the road obscures much of the view from the road to the house precinct, however. The entrance drive is cut into the berm, creating narrow linear views into the property. From the house precinct, views are afforded across the open lawn area where not blocked by tree and shrub plantings. A dense hedgerow that previously edged the house to the north, blocking views between the domestic precinct and the boxwood nursery fields sited north along Studley Road, has been removed. There is now a long view to the west from the back of the house, now reopened with the removal of several hedges and thickets.

A linear view through the woodlands is afforded along Pear Lane. Where the trail edges cultivated fields, broader views open up across the open space. A wider corridor of open space follows the utility corridor paralleling Totopotomoy Creek. Long views are present along the cleared corridor. Views along the creek are limited due to the density of vegetation overhanging the stream corridor.

Evaluation:
Due to the encroachment of woodlands throughout the landscape and the establishment of ornamental shrubs, hedges, and hedgerows around the house and in the nursery stock fields, the extent and quality of the views at Rural Plains was altered significantly from the historic period. However, recent projects associated with the Cultural Landscape Report's treatment recommendations have greatly improved the views.

Landscape Characteristic: Small Scale Features

Historic Condition:
Small-scale features are elements that provide detail and diversity for both functional needs and aesthetic concerns in the landscape. The mid-nineteenth-century domestic and agricultural landscape of Rural Plains was more physically and visually complex than that present today. Much of this complexity was related to small-scale features of the working landscape, including elements necessary to perform the chores of daily life and organize the farm's operations. One of the character-defining small-scale features of this period was the fencing used to separate fields, exclude livestock, and contain the domestic precinct. Virginia law called for the enclosure of gardens, cultivated fields, and church burial grounds, as well as the inclusion of gates in fences crossing roads that led to dwellings. As documented by historian Vanessa Patrick, the laws typically required,
"that all persons should make a sufficient fence about their cleared grounds, And that they who should be deficient herein that in case of a trespasse or damage done by the by hoggs (sic), goats or any other cattle whatsoever should be to their owne losse (sic) and detriment." (Patrick 1998: 97-98)

During the colonial period, most common fence in Virginia was the rail or zigzag fence. Other fence types generally in use included the paled fence, picket fence, wattle fence (stakes set in the ground and inter-woven horizontally with strips of split wood or flexible vegetation), and hedgerows. Rail fences were the most prevalent when sufficient supplies of timber were available. As described by

Englishman Thomas Anburey in a 1789 visit to Virginia, rail fences “are made out of trees cut or sawed into lengths of about 12 feet, that are mould or split into rails from 4” to 6” in diameter….when they form an inclosure, these rails are laid so that they cross each other obliquely at each end, and are laid zigzag to the amount of 10 or 11 rails in height….they are not very strong, but convenient, as they can be removed to any other place” (Ludgate 1939).

While it is not clear where fences were located at Rural Plains, it is certain that they were a prevalent feature of the landscape. As described by Walter Shelton: “Rural Plains was a beautiful place when the federals got there, all of the place was fenced in & cross fences.” Most likely, rail fence would have been used to mark the boundaries of the property and enclose the orchards and the cultivated fields. It may also have been used to enclose the barnyard. The 1860 Agricultural Schedule listed twenty sheep, sixteen swine, four mules, six cows, and two oxen requiring containment (Non-population Census Schedules for Virginia). There were also likely gates to provide access through the fences for circulation routes. (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: np)

Paled fence, which was more common in the eighteenth century, was a post-and-rail type with vertical boards nailed along one face of its length with little or no space between the boards. Because of the labor involved in creating them, paled fences were typically used to confine smaller areas. Picket fence, a derivative of the paled fence, but with vertical boards more elaborately cut and spaced further apart, became more common towards the end of the eighteenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century, the terms had become interchangeable (Patrick 1998: 102).

Paled or picket fencing appears to have surrounded the domestic precinct at Rural Plains at the time of the battle, as illustrated in the 1864 Waud sketch. This fence appears to have been constructed of posts set in the ground that supported horizontal rails at the top and bottom. Attached to these rails were the pales, between three and four feet in height. This fence extended in a line south of the house towards an area in front of the slave quarters and the kitchen. It likely surrounded the entire area behind the house, stood between the house and the outbuildings, and continued around the front. The fencing was referenced several times in first-hand accounts of the battle.

As described by Walter Shelton: “Dwelling House & out houses in fine condition nice fence around the yard.” In another account by Robertson, “men on the skirmish line knocked the palings off the garden fence to pass through and as a number of them stopped in the garden…” Another account recalls that soldiers “tore down the fence and formed out line of battle.” Recent archeology has found evidence of a fenceline southeast of the house in the form of postmolds, indicating the location of fence posts near the current driveway. The 1936 Historic American Buildings Survey photos also clearly indicate a wooden post south of the house and drive, which appears to correspond with the location of the fenceline indicated in Waud’s sketch, although it is unlikely that this is a remnant feature dating to the battle period. It is possible that the southern line of trees depicted in the Michler map delineates the location of fenceline. No above-ground evidence of this feature remains. (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: 52; Walker and Walker 1965: 198; Charles Storke Memoir; AOA 2009: 3)

According to the Cultural Landscape Study, another historical account described the “beautiful palings and arched gates that enclosed the front yard.” A walk is described in the 1936 Virginia Historical Inventory, but this walk is not evident in any of the historic photographs from 1936 to 1994, and no above-ground trace can be seen. Recent archeological investigations also did not reveal any evidence of this feature. Another historical small-scale feature associated with the property was the birdhouse illustrated in the 1864 Waud sketch. The only small-scale feature known to have survived from the time of the battle are the two cemetery headstones, dated 1855 and 1856, and a footstone located to the southwest of the house. Other cemetery markers may survive and be located through additional archeological investigations. (Cultural Landscape Study 2009: 60)

Other significant small-scale features include a Freeman marker and an APVA marker. From 1925 to 1928, the Battlefield Monument Association (BMA) erected 59 numbered roadside markers in the Richmond area, 15 of which are located within the park. Freeman Marker #51 was erected at Rural

Plains. In 1932 the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) also placed a marker at Rural Plains. It was the last commemorative marker placed in the park during the period of significance.

Post-Historic and Existing Conditions:
Entrance Features.
The entrance to Rural Plains and the parking area contain a number of small-scale features, including signage, fencing, gates, utility features, and a civil-war-era field cannon. A line of wooden power line poles that convey utility lines crosses the northern edge of the property along Studley Road. Signage includes a large NPS park identity sign, a white Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities marker, and numerous smaller signs indicating park boundaries, park hours, directions and wayfinding, and other purposes. A large, three-panel interpretive wayside providing information about Rural Plains and the Overland Campaign is located near the parking area, and a smaller wayside is located near the Entrance Drive in front of the house. Fencing consists of two styles of split-rail fencing: a low Virginia worm fence that borders the parking area and entrance drive and a mortised post-and-rail fence that marks the northern boundary of the park. Access to the property is controlled by metal gates at both driveway entrances. A picket gate separates the parking area from the house area.

Domestic Precinct.
Small-scale features around the house include a bell mounted on a pole, utility poles, and trail markers and other signage (Figure 32). Remnant farm equipment still remains in some of the wooded areas near the house. The park installed a replica birdhouse in March 2026, reintroducing a missing element from the Waud sketch (Figure 33, see Figure 5).

Cemetery Fencing and Gravestones.
The park recently replaced woven-wire fence with a curved or scalloped top edges with white paling fence. Set within the fencing are two marble headstones and a footstone (Figure 34). The headstones are in fair condition due to the fact that they are leaning and eroded and the inscriptions are worn and difficult to read.

Wells, Spigots, and Hand Pumps.
At least four wells were constructed on the site during the twentieth century for which evidence survives. The well that currently serves the house, drilled in the 1970s, is located near the exterior basement door and is capped with concrete. Its predecessor, now filled, lies directly to the south, adjacent to a hand pump. Another pump is located near the spur access road leading to the corn crib. A third well formerly facilitated nursery operations, while a fourth well, now filled, was used to water livestock.

Trail Features.
North of the wooden bridge across Totopotomoy Creek is a 6-foot-long wooden bench. The brown painted bench features arms and a back. A second, matching bench, is located further north on the trail near the southernmost agricultural field.

Markers.
Freeman Marker #51 is located on the south side of the Studley Road trace (Figure 35). The APVA marker at the edge of the Rural Plains Entrance Road near the intersection with Studley Road (Figure 36). The APVA marker is not listed in the table below because it is neither owned nor maintained by the NPS.

Evaluation:
Small-scale features located on or adjacent to the property include signs, site furnishings, commemorative markers, fencing, boundary markers, well structures, yard spigots, a birdhouse, and livestock feed bins. The majority of these small-scale features are associated with the house precinct, entrance drive, and trail along Pear Lane.

Landscape Features:

Feature Name	CLI Feature ID	Feature Contribution	CRIS-HS Resource ID	Associated CRIS-AR ID	FMSS Record Type	FMSS Record Number	FMSS Exact Match
Rural Plains Cemetery Stones	174424	Contributing	1168704		Location	1691791	No
Freeman Marker #51	174422	Contributing	651404		Asset	1442969	Yes
Wooden Power Lines	174432	Noncontributing – Compatible					No
Signs and Waysides	174428	Noncontributing – Compatible					No
Fencing and Gates	174434	Noncontributing – Compatible					No
Wellheads	174430	Noncontributing – Compatible					No
Benches	174426	Noncontributing – Compatible					No
Birdhouse	210822	Noncontributing – Compatible					No

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Figure 32. View looking west showing previous location of a metal bell mounted on a wooden pole near the Shelton House. (OCLP, 2023)



Figure 33. View of birdhouse (installed in 2026) south of Shelton House, looking northwest. Replica based on Waud sketch. (Richmond NBP, 2026)



Figure 34. The site of the family cemetery still contains headstones and a footstone. (Richmond NBP, 2026)



Figure 35. Freeman Marker #51 along south side of Studley Road trace, looking south. (Richmond NBP, 2026)



Figure 36. Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquites (APVA) roadside marker along south side of Studley Road, looking west. (Richmond NBP, 2026)

Landscape Characteristic: Archeological Sites

Archeological sites are the locations of ruins, traces, or deposited artifacts in the landscape and are evidenced by the presence of either surface or subsurface features. Only sites identified in approved National Register documentation are identified in this report.

The Richmond NBP Historic District encompasses more than 2,800 acres spread across multiple units, all but two of which lie north and east of the James River. To date, only the Malvern Hill, Glendale, Gaines' Mill, and Totopotomoy Creek units have undergone systematic, unit-wide archeological review or survey. Smaller-scale, primarily compliance-related projects have been conducted at Totopotomoy Creek, Drewry's Bluff, Cold Harbor, Beaver Dam, and Fort Harrison, most of which resulted in the identification of low-density pre- and post-contact artifact scatters without clear temporal or cultural affiliations. (NR 2018, Sec.8: 107; Review comment, L. Lowe, 28 July 2025)

Although the Totopotomoy Creek site has not been assigned an overall CRIS-AR number, there are three specific contributing sites noted in the National Register documentation: Federal Earthworks at Totopotomoy Creek (RICH00085–87), Shelton House (Rural Plains) (RICH00083.001), and Rural Plains Complex Site (RICH00083). For additional information on this site, see the 2018 National Register documentation. (NR 2018, Sec.7: 32)

Condition

Assessment Interval (Years): 4

Next Assessment Due Date: 07/31/2030

Condition Assessment and Impacts

Condition Assessment: Good

Assessment Date: 07/31/2026

Condition Assessment Explanatory Narrative:

The overall condition of the landscape is “Good.” Efforts by the National Park Service since it acquired the property in 2006 have begun the process of documenting existing conditions, identifying impacts, and stabilizing the resources. Clearing projects recommended in the 2016 Cultural Landscape Report have removed overgrown woodlands, nursery stock, and invasive vegetation; addressed erosion and deterioration of Federal earthworks and other contributing topographical features; and reopened previously obscured views. A number of projects have also been completed to stabilize the structure of the Shelton House.

As published in the 2025 “CLI Professional Procedures Guide,” the definition of “Good” states:
The property shows no clear evidence of major negative disturbance and deterioration by natural and/or human forces. The property’s cultural and natural values are well preserved. No immediate corrective action is required to maintain its current condition. Preservation maintenance and/or use is performed to sustain the property in good condition.

Condition Assessment: Fair

Assessment Date: 09/22/2021

Condition Assessment Explanatory Narrative:

Provisional. The condition reassessment for this CLI has been delayed due to Covid-19 travel restrictions and staffing shortages. In the meantime, the most recent condition assessment will remain in place until it is reassessed as part of a comprehensive update of the entire CLI. Planning and scheduling this update will occur in FY 2022.

Condition Assessment: Fair

Assessment Date: 09/15/2015

Condition Assessment Explanatory Narrative:

The condition of the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains landscape is “fair.” The property shows clear evidence of minor disturbances and deterioration by natural and/or human forces, and some degree of corrective action is needed within 3-5 years to prevent further harm to its cultural and/or natural values. If left to continue without the appropriate corrective action, the cumulative effect of the deterioration of many of the character-defining elements will cause the property to degrade to a poor condition.

The condition assessment is based on the loss of historic character and features that diminish the site’s ability to convey its significance. The primary impacts affecting the condition of Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield at Rural Plains are related to natural and invasive vegetation that cover large portions of the property. This vegetation alters important spatial relationships, block sightlines and obscures historic views, and generally diminishes the integrity of the site. The vegetation includes forest cover in areas that were historically open, ornamental vegetation occupying nursery stock fields, and overgrown hedgerows. Large trees growing in or on earthworks pose a risk of being uprooted by strong winds and damaging the earthworks.

Impacts

Type of Impact: Adjacent Lands

Other Impact:

External or Internal: External

Impact Narrative: The presence of small-lot suburban residential development adjacent to the site alters the historic setting. Most development occupies land that was once a part of Rural Plains and was part of the Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield. Lands that are not developed are privately owned and may be developed in the future.

Date Identified: 09/04/2015

Resolved? No

Type of Impact: Erosion

Other Impact:

External or Internal: Internal

Impact Narrative: The remaining visible Union earthworks at Rural Plains are slowly eroding. While these do not currently show signs of rapid erosion, the accumulated effects of wind and rain will cause the gradual deterioration of the earthworks.

Date Identified: 09/04/2015

Resolved? No

Type of Impact: Release To Succession

Other Impact:

External or Internal: Internal

Impact Narrative: Much of the area that was historically open has reverted to second-growth forest since the historic period. A reduction in the total area under agricultural cultivation has resulted in many of the farm fields reverting to forest. All but one of the agricultural fields that were converted to nursery stock fields is overgrown.

Date Identified: 09/04/2015

Resolved? No

Type of Impact:	Vegetation/Invasive Plants
Other Impact:	
External or Internal:	Internal
Impact Narrative:	Recent projects have reduced most of the invasive and non-native vegetation is present throughout the property, particularly in forest edges. This vegetation originates from adjacent developed and natural land.
Date Identified:	07/31/2026
Resolved?	No

Treatment

Stabilization Measures

Treatment Documents

Document Type: Cultural Landscape Report Parts 1 and 2

Document Date: 2016-01-01

Title:

IRMA Link:

Narrative:

The management objective outlined in the park's 1996 General Management Plan (GMP) is, "to identify, evaluate, protect, restore, and preserve park cultural resources important to the understanding of the military actions during the 1862 Peninsula Campaign and the 1864 and 1865 battle actions that resulted in the final struggle for Richmond." Regarding Totopotomoy Creek, the GMP recommended acquiring this unit and developing waysides. (GMP 1996: 24,42)

The 2016 "Cultural Landscape Report for Rural Plains, Richmond National Battlefield Park, Part 2: Treatment," presented a treatment approach, philosophy, and specific tasks for the landscape. The CLR recommended Rehabilitation as the preferred treatment:
"Incomplete documentation of the historic landscape prior to the twentieth century presents a significant challenge to treatment approaches intended to restore or recreate historic conditions. Within this context of limited documentation and the objectives outlined in the treatment philosophy, the treatment approach of Rehabilitation is recommended at Rural Plains to reinstate important historic relationships and enhance the historic character, while offering the opportunity to interpret missing elements of the plantation landscape, provide universal access to the Shelton House, improve visitor services, and facilitate ongoing maintenance and safety needs. Based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, treatment may include actions to preserve historic features, repair or replace deteriorated materials, reinstate missing features, or add interpretive elements to help convey the site's historic associations." (CLR 2026: 62)

The treatment reference period was identified as 1864-1927:
"At Rural Plains, the overall period of significance extends from 1725, when the Shelton House was constructed, until 1932, when the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities erected a commemorative sign on the north boundary of the property. The treatment reference period is a smaller subset of the period of significance, extending from 1864 to 1927. This range incorporates the period of the site's primary significance as a Civil War battlefield and allows for interpretation of multiple aspects of the site's history, including the long continuous use of the land for agriculture. During this period, the overall arrangement and character of the Rural Plains landscape was stable, with few significant changes to the landscape condition."

"The end date of 1927 corresponds to the year the operation of the Rural Plains nursery was initiated and the character of the landscape began to change more substantially. With the exception of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities marker installed at Rural Plains in 1932, landscape features that post-date 1927 are not related to the site's significance and are non-contributing resources." (CLR 2016: 63-64)

Additionally, Totopotomoy Creek Battlefield is included in the park's Earthworks Management Plan and Fire Management Plan. The plan, based on earthwork management guideline documents, plant ecology, and soil science, describes the park's practices to preserve earthworks while showcasing key areas for visitors and minimizing maintenance costs. It outlines that full forest coverage is the best way to protect soil from erosion and to monitor for and remove hazard trees where applicable. (PEPC 115308; Review comment, K. Allen, 28 July 2025)

Treatment Type: Rehabilitation

Treatment Completed: No

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