



### Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War



*(Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park)*

High on a bluff in Stafford County, Virginia, overlooking the Rappahannock River and the town of Fredericksburg beyond, stands the 18th-century plantation house called Chatham. For years this house stood as the centerpiece of a prosperous estate supported by the labor of nearly 100 enslaved individuals. Between 1862 and 1864 it became, in turn, an army headquarters, a communications center, a hospital, a campsite, and a refuge from the cold for Union soldiers.

The setting of Chatham has changed little over the years, so it is easy to imagine what it was like during the Civil War. Standing on the terraced lawn, you can see where thousands of Union soldiers descended the nearby ravine and passed over the river on pontoon bridges. From the high ground above the ravine, artillery shells flew overhead to clear the soldiers' way to the battle lines where many met death or were grievously wounded. Turning back toward the house, you can envision the scene after the battle--the dark figures of men and women holding lanterns to light the way for the ambulances and supply wagons, the moaning of the hundreds of Union wounded who were taken to that makeshift hospital, and the lawns that quickly had become trampled, raw, and muddy from feet, hooves, and wagon wheels. Off by the few trees left standing were scattered arms, legs, hands, and feet, the grisly results of the surgeons' amputations.

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Four major Civil War battles were fought in the countryside surrounding Chatham. Wartime figures, famous and ordinary, passed through the house, some who would move on to greatness, some cast adrift by the upheaval of military occupation, and some far from homes they would never see again. In the wake of passing armies, Chatham, like the war-torn town visible from its front door, emerged standing, but forever changed by the turmoil of civil war.



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### Where this lesson fits into the curriculum

**Time Period:** This lesson could be used in American history courses in teaching units on the Civil War and women's history.

**Topics:** Mid-19th century

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### **Relevant United States History Standards for Grades 5-12**

*This lesson relates to the following National Standards for History from the UCLA National Center for History in the Schools:*

#### **US History Era 5**

- **Standard 2B:** The student understands the social experience of the war on the battlefield and homefront.
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### **Relevant Curriculum Standards for Social Studies**

*This lesson relates to the following Curriculum Standards for Social Studies from the National Council for the Social Studies:*

#### **Theme II: Time, Continuity and Change**

- Standard F: The student uses knowledge of facts and concepts drawn from history, along with methods of historical inquiry, to inform decision-making about and action-taking on public issues.

#### **Theme III: People, Places, and Environment**

- Standard D: The student estimates distance, calculate scale, and distinguish other geographic relationships such as population density and spatial distribution patterns.
- Standard I: The student describes ways that historical events have been influenced by, and have influenced, physical and human geographic factors in local, regional, national, and global settings.



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### **Relevant Common Core Standards**

*This lesson relates to the following Common Core English and Language Arts Standards for History and Social Studies for middle and high school students:*

#### **Key Ideas and Details**

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.3

#### **Craft and Structure**

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.6

#### **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas**

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.8

#### **Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:**

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.10



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### About This Lesson

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file, "[Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park](https://npgallery.nps.gov/pdfhost/docs/NRHP/Text/66000046.pdf)" [<https://npgallery.nps.gov/pdfhost/docs/NRHP/Text/66000046.pdf>] (with [photographs](https://npgallery.nps.gov/pdfhost/docs/NRHP/Photos/66000046.pdf) <https://npgallery.nps.gov/pdfhost/docs/NRHP/Photos/66000046.pdf>), "Chatham Preliminary Historic Resource Study," and primary sources from the park. It was published in 2001. It was written by Elsa W. Lohman and Janice M. Frye, Park Rangers at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania Battlefields National Military Park. It was edited by Fay Metcalf and the Teaching with Historic Places staff. TwHP is sponsored, in part, by the Cultural Resources Training Initiative and Parks as Classrooms programs of the National Park Service. This lesson is one in a series that brings the important stories of historic places into the classrooms across the country.

### **Objectives**

1. To explain why Chatham became a center of activity during the many battles that were fought near the house;
2. To identify the major personalities associated with Chatham;
3. To describe the impact of the war on Chatham and its owners;
4. To determine, based on the history of Chatham, to what period the house should be restored;
5. To examine how a war or a similar disaster affected people from their own community.

### **Materials for students**

**The materials listed below can either be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students.**

1. Two maps showing the importance of the geography of the Fredericksburg area to the military campaigns of 1862-1864;
2. Three readings about the use of the house during the Civil War;
3. One document advertising Chatham in the Fredericksburg News;
4. Two photos of historical and modern views of the house.

### **Visiting the site**

Chatham now serves as the headquarters of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, which is administered by the National Park Service. Visitors may take a self-guided tour of the four nearby battlefields, the Stonewall Jackson Shrine, and the historic house itself. For more information write to the Superintendent, 120 Chatham Lane, Fredericksburg, VA 22405, or [visit the park's Web page](#).



### Getting Started



*(Library of Congress)*

**When might this photo have been taken?  
What appears to be happening?**

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### Photo Analysis Worksheet

#### Step 1:

Examine the photograph for 10 seconds. How would you describe the photograph?

#### Step 2:

Divide the photograph into quadrants and study each section individually. What details--such as people, objects, activities--do you notice?

#### Step 3:

What other information--such as time period, location, season, reason photo was taken--can you gather from the photo?

#### Step 4:

How would you revise your first description of the photo using the information noted in Steps 2 and 3?

#### Step 5:

What questions do you have about the photograph? How might you find answers to these questions?



## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### Setting the Stage

Virginia seceded from the Union in April 1861. As the northernmost state in the Confederacy, it became the central ground over which major campaigns of the Civil War were fought. From the Battle of Manassas (Bull Run) in 1861 to the surrender at Appomattox Court House in 1865, the armies of the North and the South moved to and fro across Virginia's landscape. The same avenues of trade, transportation, and communication that had brought prosperity to the Fredericksburg area of Virginia now brought war. The Rappahannock River flowed past the town carrying people and goods between western and central Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay. The Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad and a network of wagon roads connected Fredericksburg with Washington, D.C., and Richmond, the capitals of the United States of America and the Confederate States of America respectively.

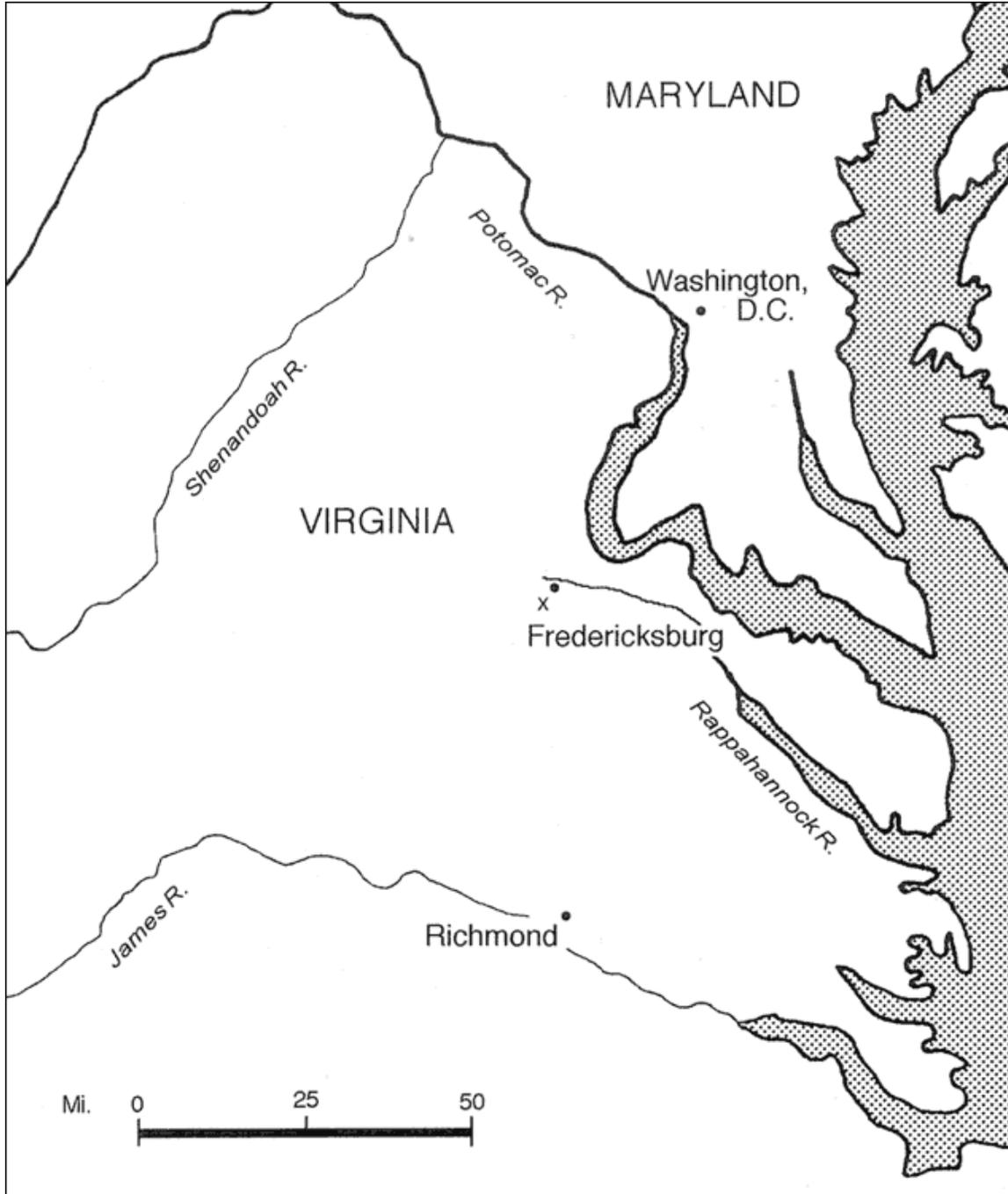
In the countryside surrounding Fredericksburg, four major battles raged: the Battle of Fredericksburg (December 11-13, 1862), the Battle of Chancellorsville (April 27-May 6, 1863), the Battle of the Wilderness (May 5-6, 1864), and the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House (May 8-21, 1864). When the guns finally fell silent at the end of the war, nearly 100,000 casualties could be counted in the region. The military activity in and around Fredericksburg had a dramatic impact not only on the soldiers who fought there, but also on the citizens of the area and the land on which they lived. Chatham, an 18th-century plantation house and the family home of J. Horace Lacy, sits high on a bluff overlooking Fredericksburg. Its commanding location helped insure that this house would become an important part of Fredericksburg's Civil War history.



## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### Locating the Site

Map 1: Fredericksburg, Virginia and surrounding region





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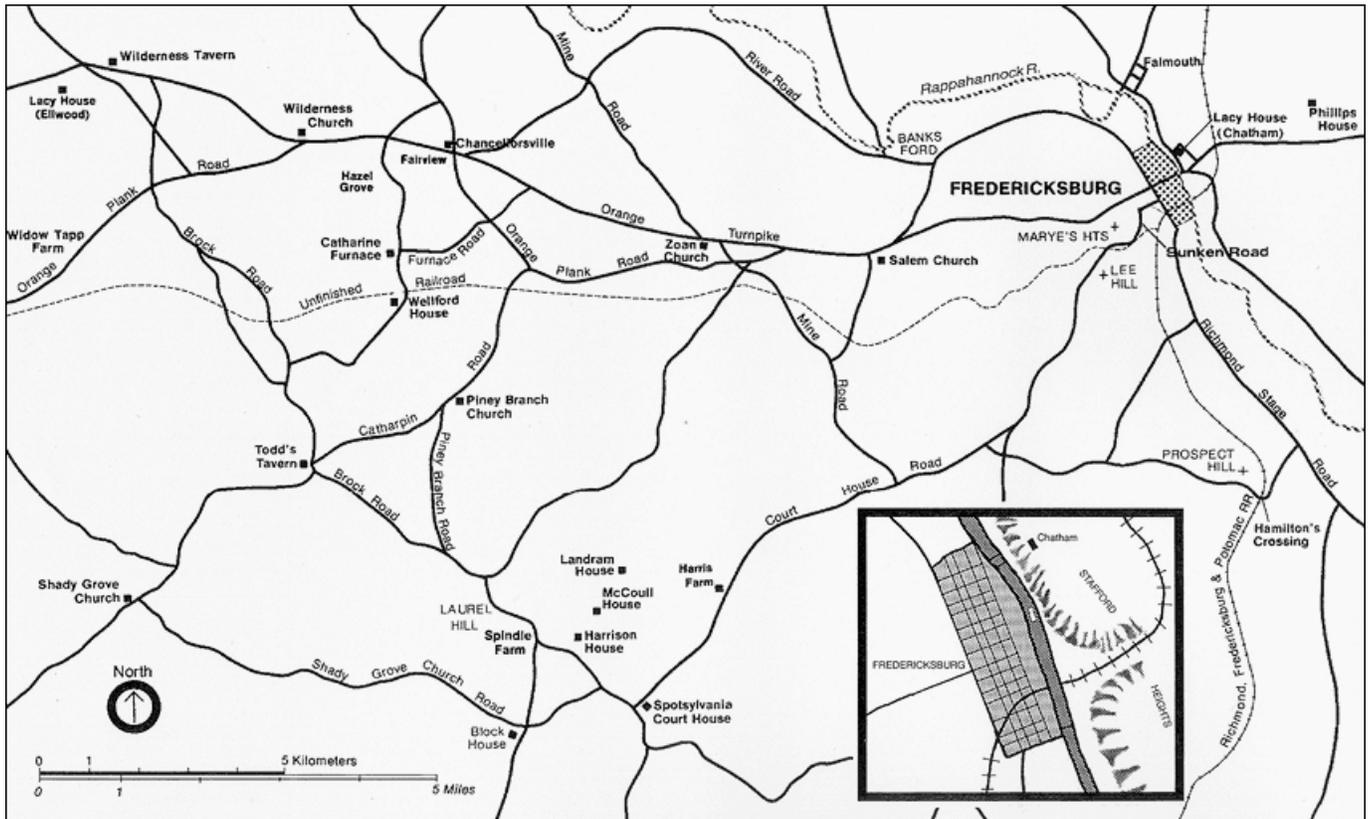
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## Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War

### Locating the Site

Map 2: Chatham, above the Rappahannock River (inset), and Fredericksburg, Virginia, and surrounding area, 1861-65



(Adapted from National Park Service map)

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## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### Questions for Map 2

- 1) Locate Chatham on Map 2. What are some of the natural and man-made features near Chatham?
- 2) Why do you think the Union forces might have found Chatham's location helpful?
- 3) Find the general location of the Civil War battles mentioned in Setting the Stage that took place in the area and use the scale to determine approximately how far each battlefield was from Chatham.



## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### Determining the Facts

#### Reading 1: The Impact of the Civil War on Chatham

For nearly a century before the Civil War split the country apart, Chatham stood quietly on the high ground overlooking Fredericksburg, Virginia. Its lands had gradually been developed into a typical plantation with outbuildings, barns, large fields, livestock, and enslaved workers. James Horace Lacy acquired the property in 1857, and throughout the Civil War the plantation house was known as the Lacy House.

Lacy was a prominent businessman, civic leader, and farmer. His family lived comfortably in their spacious house with its pastoral surroundings. From the green terraces in front of Chatham, the Lacy children could see the prosperous town of Fredericksburg. They watched as boats sailed along the Rappahannock River below their house or as horse-drawn wagons and carriages crossed the nearby bridge onto the busy streets beyond. A nearby wooded ravine led down to the river's edge. Enslaved field laborers worked the nearby grain fields while enslaved individuals working in the household carried out domestic duties in the many outbuildings and in the plantation house.

Lacy and his young family had no thought that conflict might disturb their comfortable and happy way of life. But when war erupted in 1861, the fortunes of the Lacy family and their house were changed forever. When J. Horace Lacy offered his services to the new Confederate army, Mrs. Lacy and their five children left Chatham and resided with various friends and relatives in other parts of Virginia, away from the anticipated battles. Household furnishings and enslaved workers were transported to other landholdings outside Fredericksburg and further south. Lacy would be separated from his family for much of the war.

Vast armies occupied the countryside around Chatham for much of the next four years. A New York soldier recalled:

About opposite to the central part of Fredericksburg, and a few hundred feet from the river, was an old Brick mansion, known as the Lacy house, from its owner. Lacy was a rebel from choice, and ranked as a Major in the Confederate army. His house was very large with no attempt at exterior ornamentation; within, however, wealth and art had left abundant evidence of their profuse employment to make the dwelling a fit abode for most refined and aesthetic inhabitants. The grounds descended to the river in terraces, and the house and its surroundings could not well be surpassed for beauty, elegance and comfort.<sup>1</sup>

With the owners away, however, the house fell victim to vandalism and ill use. Mrs. Lacy reported, "Uncle Jack, our old gardener, who was left in charge of the place, said he frequently saw the soldiers ride up one flight of stone steps, through the wide hall and down the other flight in the rear of the house."<sup>2</sup> Later in the war another soldier could still find a small reminder of domestic serenity as he rode past Chatham. He wrote, "The owner of the deserted house is in the rebel army; his garden is a disaster but what moved me most, a child's rocking-horse stood by a door, unharmed in all the strife."<sup>3</sup>

When peace finally came in 1865, Lacy led his family back to their familiar home only to find it uninhabitable. Mrs. Lacy remembered her return as "heartrending." She went on to describe how serious the damage was: "All the paneling had been stripped from the walls, every door and window was gone, literally only the bare brick walls were left standing. The trees had been cut down, the yard and garden were a wilderness of weeds and briars and there were nineteen Federal graves on the lawn."<sup>4</sup>

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Like many Southern plantation owners, Lacy lost his financial resources and his source of labor. It took years to refurbish the Chatham estate and regain productivity of the land. Continued financial difficulties convinced the Lacys to sell Chatham in 1872. They moved to another family plantation known as Ellwood, 16 miles west of Fredericksburg. There they continued to live and farm into the early 20th century.

Little is known about how those formerly enslaved by the Lacy's former. In 1863 one enslaved individual at Chatham, Charles Henry Sprout, enlisted in the United States Colored Troops, African American regiments that fought with the Northern armies. When Sprout was discharged in 1866 in Texas, he returned to Fredericksburg to live. He died in 1926 and was buried in the Fredericksburg National Cemetery. Another enslaved individual, Charlie Weedon, served as a guide for Confederate troops during military operations in the Chancellorsville and Wilderness campaigns. It is uncertain if he survived the war.



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### Questions for Reading 1

- 1) What features made Chatham a typical southern plantation when J. Horace Lacy purchased it in 1857?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) What happened to the plantation and the Lacy family when the Civil War began?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) How was the house changed while the Lacys were gone?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) How would you feel if your home and family were disrupted by war or a disaster? Do you think it would have been easier or harder for the Lacy family if their house had been destroyed?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) What happened to the people enslaved by the Lacy's? Why do you think we know so little about what happened to them after the war?



## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### Determining the Facts

#### Reading 2: Chatham at the Center of Military Activities

In the spring of 1862 the Union armies under command of Major General George B. McClellan began the Peninsula Campaign--an effort to take the Confederate capital of Richmond. Part of the Union forces were sent to Fredericksburg to guard the path to Washington. During that period Union General Irvin McDowell used Chatham as his headquarters. McDowell carefully protected the resources on the plantation. Valuable wheat crops were placed under armed guard and the house itself was not harmed. In early May President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton visited this Union headquarters to confer with McDowell on strategy and inspect the now occupied town. In late May the army left Fredericksburg and moved toward the Shenandoah Valley. Throughout that spring, summer, and into the fall, however, a parade of officers and men passed through Chatham's halls. As time went on, respect for the house and property disappeared. On July 2, 1862, the Fredericksburg Christian Banner reported that "the grounds surrounding [Chatham], which had been tended with so much care, were now covered with the tents of staff officers and orderlies; the fences were gone, the shrubbery destroyed, and the whole plain, now covered with troops, was, aside from the bustle of marshaling hosts, a barren, uninviting waste."

In the weeks prior to the Battle of Fredericksburg (December 11-13, 1862), Chatham once again became a Union headquarters. In mid-November the Union army, divided into three grand divisions, arrived on Stafford Heights overlooking Fredericksburg. General Ambrose E. Burnside, the army's commander, was headquartered at the Phillips House (see Map 2) while Edwin V. Sumner, commander of the Right Grand Division, used Chatham as his command post. On December 11, the Union army crossed the Rappahannock, encountering Confederate troops in the town of Fredericksburg before making its way toward Confederate General Robert E. Lee's forces posted on the high ground west of the city. On that same morning, Burnside visited Sumner at Chatham and noted its unparalleled view of the town. From Chatham it was possible to see upstream and downstream along Stafford Heights, where hundreds of Union artillery pieces were posted. One officer remembered that December 11 visit to Chatham: "Pausing in our route, at General Sumner's headquarters there was spread below the once beautiful town of Fredericksburg, now in flames [from the Union artillery], and from all appearances to soon become a mass of ruins...."<sup>1</sup>Chatham's location would thus make it a prime center from which Sumner could send and receive information from various positions during the ensuing battle. On December 13 Burnside ordered attacks on the Confederates at Marye's Heights and below Fredericksburg at Prospect Hill. The attacks failed, and Union soldiers perished by the thousands. In fact, on that day General Lee won his most one-sided victory of the war.

The Federal soldiers who survived the fighting wearily re-crossed the river to Stafford Heights, where they spent the winter in makeshift huts recuperating, training, and waiting to fight the enemy again. These soldiers needed large amounts of wood to build their log huts and corduroy roads (roads made by placing logs crosswise on footpaths, especially in low-lying areas, to provide traction for men's boots and horse's hooves) and to make fires with which to cook and keep warm. In their search for wood they cut down most of the trees in a huge area around Chatham. Also burned, according to one account, was anything in the house made of wood. Some Union troops--frontline guards or pickets--camped in the house where they were somewhat protected from the raw wind and cold. One man remembered:

...our reserve was stationed in a ravine near the Lacy house, without warm food, or even fire to make coffee--so indispensable to a soldier, entirely without shelter, and for the greater portion of the time with clothing wet through, and frozen stiff, unable during the

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whole time to lie down or sleep. The weather for the entire winter was terribly severe, raining and freezing most of the time...<sup>2</sup>

During the spring of 1863, Chatham was used again briefly as a command post. The Union army tried to break through the Confederate defenses at Chancellorsville to the west of Fredericksburg, but Stonewall Jackson drove them back in a surprise Confederate attack on May 2. Later on that day, Jackson was accidentally shot and mortally wounded by his own troops.

In the spring of 1864 cannon boomed and blood flowed again when the armies of Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee clashed twice--at the Wilderness Battlefield, and again at the prolonged and bloody Battle of Spotsylvania Court House. With each battle, Fredericksburg's sufferings increased; by the time the war ended, the town was a shambles and Chatham stood quiet and desolate as the armies moved north. Never again would it house Union generals, though it provided shelter as long as troops remained in the area.





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### Determining the Facts

#### Reading 3: Chatham as Hospital

In the aftermath of the Battle of Fredericksburg, hundreds of wounded Union soldiers poured back across the icy Rappahannock River to receive medical attention in tents and buildings. Chatham served as one of many hospitals where overworked surgeons and volunteers attended to what seemed like endless streams of injured soldiers. Clara Barton and Walt Whitman were two of the volunteers to come to Chatham. Of what she witnessed in the field hospital at Chatham, Barton wrote, "...men were crowded into the Lacy House which contained but twelve rooms. They covered every foot of the floors and porticos and even lay on the stair landings!"

Barton, who later founded the American Red Cross, was eager to get to Fredericksburg before the battle. She had already experienced the horrors of the makeshift hospitals on the battlefield at Antietam in September of 1862, and she knew how much her help was needed. She quickly organized a routine for the treatment of the wounded at Chatham, as well as for those wounded who were taken to houses and churches in the town. In one letter home she described being hindered in her movements inside Chatham by her long skirts, which became heavy as they were soaked with blood.

The poet Walt Whitman came to Chatham searching for his brother who had been reported severely wounded during the battle. Relieved to find his brother had suffered only slight wounds, Whitman decided to remain to help those soldiers more seriously injured. He recorded many of his observations in diaries, letters, and books:

[I] spent a good part of the day in a large brick mansion on the banks of the Rappahannock, immediately opposite Fredericksburg. It is used as a hospital since the battle, and seems to have received only the worst cases. Outdoors, at the foot of a tree, within ten yards of the front of the house, I notice a heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, hands, etc.--about a load for a one-horse cart. Several dead bodies lie near, each covered with its own brown woolen blanket.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the wounded were eventually transported north to Washington, D.C., to recuperate in that city's hospitals. Whitman also journeyed there and continued to nurse soldiers. Sadly, however, some soldiers never left Chatham. They succumbed to their injuries and were laid to rest in the trampled gardens around the old house. Many other houses and buildings closer to the fighting at Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House were used as field hospitals by the armies. Chatham no longer sheltered the suffering casualties.

When the Fredericksburg National Cemetery was established following the Civil War, Union soldiers were moved there from original burial sites on the battlefields and nearby field hospitals. Burial details disinterred nearly 100 soldiers from the grounds surrounding Chatham and reburied them alongside 15,000 other soldiers in the cemetery. The National Cemetery is now a part of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park.



## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### Questions for Reading 3

- 1) Why do you think Chatham was used as a hospital?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) What happened to the bodies of the soldiers who died of their injuries at Chatham?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) Why would the army surgeons have welcomed help from civilians like Clara Barton and Walt Whitman to attend to the wounded?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) What purpose does the American Red Cross serve today? Do you think Clara Barton's experiences in the Civil War influenced the founding of the American Red Cross? Why?



## Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War

### Visual Evidence

#### Document 1: Advertisement for Chatham in *Fredericksburg News*, October 20, 1857

**PUBLIC SALE**  
—OF—  
**CHATHAM.**

THE undersigned, special Commissioners, of the Circuit Court of Stafford, will offer for sale at public auction, on the premises, (unless the REAL ESTATE be sold at private sale,) on **TUESDAY the 10th day of NOVEMBER next,** if fair, otherwise, the first fair day thereafter, the

**REAL ESTATE,**  
THE PLATE, AND THE  
HOUSEHOLD AND KITCHEN  
FURNITURE,

belonging to the estate of the late Judge John Coalter.

This estate, the residence of the late Judge Coalter, known as **CHATHAM,** contains about **SEVEN HUNDRED AND TWELVE ACRES,** lies on the Rappahannock river immediately opposite the town of Fredericksburg—extends up to the village of Falmouth, and communicates with Fredericksburg by a toll-bridge which the owner of the estate has a *perpetual right to use, TOLL FREE,* for all family and farming purposes. The soil is productive and improvable.—The meadow and table lands of superior quality.

 The site of the House is strikingly beautiful, with a Garden finely cultivated, and ornamented with very extensive terraces. The dwelling is of brick, in good repair, and has ten spacious rooms. There are also all necessary out houses, farm buildings, and a valuable

**GRIST MILL,**

within a quarter of a mile of the town, on this estate.

There are also two good FISHERIES, from one of which an abundant supply of Herring and Shad for the farm are annually taken, and the other is readily rented out.

The advantages of every kind, which the owner of this handsome residence and valuable farm will enjoy, are obvious, and will be readily appreciated by any one visiting the estate.

The Real Estate, unless previously sold at private sale, will be offered at 10 o'clock in the morning, on the day of sale.

The terms of sale are as follows:

For the Real Estate, ten per cent of the purchase money in Cash, and the residue in three equal payments, at six, twelve and twenty-four months from the day of sale; and after the sale is confirmed by the court, a deed of trust on the said realty to be executed to secure the deferred payments, for which bonds with good personal security will be required at the sale.

For the personal property—all sums of twenty-five dollars and under, Cash—from twenty-five to fifty dollars on a credit of sixty days—over fifty and to one hundred dollars, on a credit of four months—and one hundred dollars and over that amount, on a credit of six months, on bonds with good security.

At the same time and place, and on the usual terms, the Executor of the late occupant of the estate, will sell the

Horses, Mules, Cattle, Sheep, Hogs,  
Crop of Corn,  
A large supply of Fodder and wheat straw,  
and all the **FARMING IMPLEMENTS, &c.**

Persons desiring to purchase the Estate are referred to Messrs. FITZHUGH & LITTLE, Attorneys at Law, of Fredericksburg, Virginia.

JOHN R. BRYAN,  
H. B. TOMLIN.

October 8, 1857—ts.

(Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park)



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**(Transcription) Document 1: Advertisement for Chatham in *Fredericksburg News*, October 20, 1857**

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This estate, the residence of the late Judge Coalter, known as Chatham, contains about SEVEN HUNDRED AND TWELVE ACRES, lies on the Rappahannock river immediately opposite the town of Fredericksburg--extends up to the village of Falmouth, and communicates with Fredericksburg by a toll-bridge which the owner of the estate has a *perpetual right to use, TOLL FREE*, for all family and farming purposes. The soil is productive and improvable.--The meadow and table lands of superior quality.

The site of the House is strikingly beautiful, with a Garden finely cultivated, and ornamented with very extensive terraces. The dwelling is of brick, in good repair, and has ten spacious rooms. There are also all necessary out houses, farm buildings, and a valuable GRIST MILL, within a quarter of a mile of the town, on this estate.

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JOHN R. BRYAN,  
H. B. TOMLIN

October 8, 1857--ts.



## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### Questions for Document 1

- 1) Read as much as you can make out from Document 1, which J. Horace Lacy probably read in 1857.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) What does the advertisement suggest are the advantages of the plantation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) Would any of those advantages also be appropriate for the use of the plantation as an army base and army hospital?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) What might have disappeared from the plantation as a result of the war? What do you think would have been left behind?

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## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### Visual Evidence

Photo 1: Chatham, c. 1862



*(Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park)*

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## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### Visual Evidence

#### Photo 1: Chatham as it appears today



*(Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park)*

The plantation declined after the Civil War and diminished from almost 1300 acres to 30 acres. Chatham was renovated in the 1920s by the owners, but was not donated to the National Park Service until 1975. It now serves as the park headquarters and an exhibit building.



# Teaching with Historic Places

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### **Putting It All Together**

Chatham, now preserved as part of a national park, is a good place in which to learn of the Civil War's impact on a particular area and its residents, especially those whose homes became part of the battlefields of the war. The following activities will help students to understand the history of this plantation house.

### **Activity 1: Write a Letter Home**

Have students pretend that they are Union soldiers stationed near Chatham during the winter of 1862-63. Based on the readings, the photo, and the document, have them write a letter home, or a short article for a newspaper, telling people who live in a different part of the country what it was like at Chatham during that winter. After students have completed the assignment, have them get together in groups of five or six to share their letters. Then hold a general classroom discussion about the impact wars can have on the soldiers, on the countryside where battles are fought, and on those who are forced to evacuate their homes.



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### **Activity 2: Restoration of Chatham**

Chatham stood for 90 years before the outbreak of the Civil War. The plantation declined after the war and was sold by Lacy in 1872. In the early 20th century, several of the owners of Chatham transformed the appearance of the house and grounds. They installed new paneling on the interior walls, tore down the 19th-century porches, and planted trees and formal gardens around the house. They even made the back door into the front door! Have students pretend they are historic preservationists discussing the restoration of Chatham. Explain that the house documents more than 150 years of history. How they restore it will reflect what parts of its history they think are the most relevant or have the most to tell about the site. Ask students if they think the Civil War era is more "relevant" than the 18th-century period of Chatham's history when it served as a plantation home. Do they think Chatham should be returned to its appearance at the time it was built, as it appeared during the Civil War, or as it was renovated in the early 20th century? Have students justify their answers. Remind students that historians now consider early 20th-century houses to be historic. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of each option? Should special rules apply to house museums, or should all old houses be treated the same? Finally, ask students to find out if there are any Civil War-era buildings in their community. If there are, what was their historical function? What function do they serve today? Have any efforts been made to restore them?



## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### **Activity 3: Living through a War**

Have students work in groups of three or four and interview someone in their community or members of their family who lived through a war or a natural disaster. Have groups discuss the information they gathered from the interviews and present their findings to the class. When all presentations have been completed, have the class discuss how the experiences of these local people compared or contrasted with the experiences of the Lacy family, the wounded soldiers, and civilians like Barton and Whitman during the Civil War.



## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### References and Endnotes

#### Reading 1

Reading 1 was compiled from Ralph Happel, *Chatham: The Life of a House* (Philadelphia: Eastern National Park and Monument Association, 1984); Ruth Coder Fitzgerald, *A Different Story: A Black History of Fredericksburg, Stafford and Spotsylvania, Virginia* (Fredericksburg: Unicorn Press, 1979); Wilson Greene, J. Horace Lacy: *The Most Dangerous Rebel in the County* (Richmond: Owens Publishing Company, 1988); and Ronald W. Johnson, "Chatham Preliminary Historic Resource Study," National Park Service, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, 1982.

<sup>1</sup>Theodore B. Gates, *The Ulster Guard 20th N.Y. State Militia and the War of the Rebellion, Embracing History* (New York, 1879), 222-223.

<sup>2</sup>Betty Churchill (Jones) Lacy, "Memories of a Long Life," April, 1903, p. 6, unpublished manuscript, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park.

<sup>3</sup>Alonzo H. Quint, *The Potomac and the Rapidan, Army Notes, From the Failure at Winchester to the Reinforcement of Rosecrans 1861-1863* (Boston: Crosby and Nichols, 1864), 291.

<sup>4</sup>Lacy, 7.

#### Reading 2

Reading 2 is excerpted from Ronald W. Johnson, "Chatham Preliminary Historic Resource Study," National Park Service, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, 1982.

<sup>1</sup>Oliver Christian Bosbyshell, *The 48th in the War. Being a Narrative of the Campaigns of the 48th Regiment Infantry, Pennsylvania Volunteers, During the War of the Rebellion* (Philadelphia: Avil Printing Company, 1895), 95.

<sup>2</sup>Eugene A. Cory, "A Private's Recollections of Fredericksburg" in *Personal Narratives of Events in the War of the Rebellion, Being Papers Read Before the Rhode Island Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society*, Third Series--No. 4 (Providence, 1884), 14-15.

#### Reading 3

Reading 3 is excerpted from Ronald W. Johnson, "Chatham Preliminary Historic Resource Study," National Park Service, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, 1982.

<sup>1</sup>Richard M. Buck, ed., *Walt Whitman, The Wound Dresser: Letters Written to His Mother from Hospitals in Washington During the Civil War* (New York: Bodley Press, 1949), 22-23.



## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### **Additional Resources**

By looking at *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*, students learn why this home in Fredericksburg, Virginia, was a center of military activity, and consider the impact the war had on those whose property became part of the battlefield. Those interested in learning more will find that the Internet offers a variety of interesting materials.

### **Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park**

Chatham is part of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, which is a unit of the National Park System. Visit the [park's web pages](#) to learn more about the many historic sites, Civil War battles, and people associated with this park's history.

### **Civil War Women: Primary Sources on the Internet**

Compiled by the Duke Special Collections Library, [Civil War Women](#) is an on-line manuscript collection which documents women's experiences in the Civil War. Included are diaries, documents, and letters from a variety of different women. Also of special interest are several letters by enslaved women from Duke's [African American Women Online Archival Collections](#).

### **Hearts at Home: Southern Women in the Civil War**

Created by the University of Virginia Special Collections department, [Hearts at Home](#) is an on-line manuscript collection examining different aspects of southern women's experiences during the Civil War.

### **Clara Barton National Historic Site**

Clara Barton National Historic Site, Clara Barton's home in Glen Echo, Maryland is a unit of the National Park Service. [The park's web pages](#) detail her incredible story, including her relief efforts during the Civil War and with the American Red Cross.

### **The American Battlefield Protection Program**

The [American Battlefield Protection Program](#), a division of the National Park Service, provides detailed on-line publications featuring different topics in the Civil War. Included is a battle summary of the Battle of Santa Rosa Island.

### **National Park Service Civil War Website**

Visit the official [National Park Service Civil War website](#). Offering the current generation of Americans an opportunity to know, discuss, and commemorate this country's greatest national crisis, while at the same time exploring its enduring relevance in the present, the website includes a variety of helpful features such as a timeline and stories from various perspectives. Also included are links to Civil War Parks, NPS education programs, and much more.

### **Historic Places Honoring Those Who Served**

The National Register of Historic Places online itinerary [Civil War Era National Cemeteries: Honoring Those Who Served](#) commemorates the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. This itinerary explains where the idea of national cemeteries came from and their meaning today.

### **Civil War Soldiers & Sailors System**

The National Park Service's [Civil War Soldiers & Sailors System](#) is a recently created database containing facts about Civil War servicemen, lists of Civil War regiments, and descriptions of significant Civil War battles. Also on this site is a descriptive history of African Americans in the Civil War.

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## *Chatham Plantation: Witness to the Civil War*

### **Library of Congress**

The Library of Congress created a selected Civil War photographic history in their [digital collections](#). Included on the site is a photographic time line of the Civil War covering major events for each year of the war.

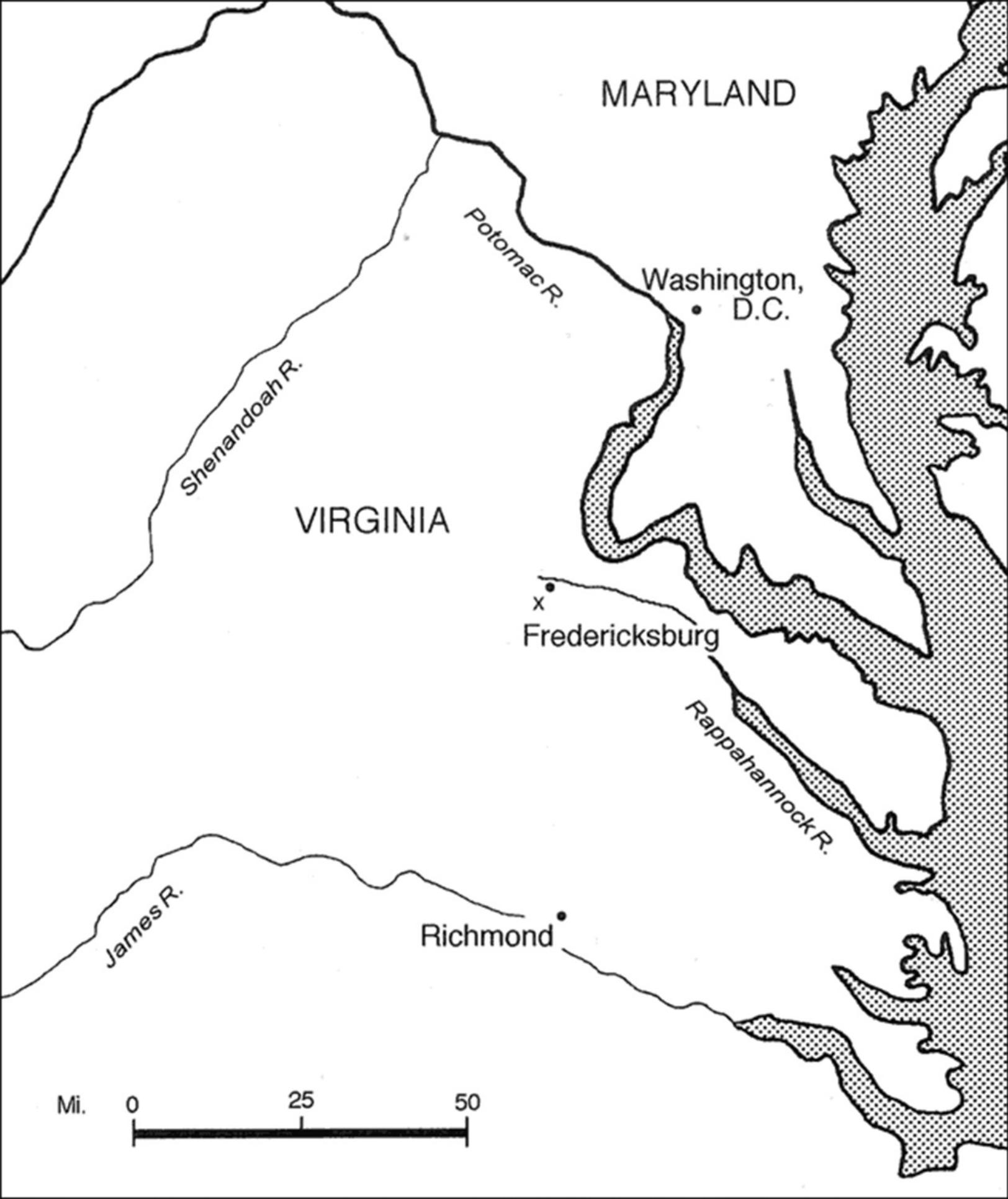
### **The American Civil War Museum**

[The American Civil War Museum](#) is a center to explore the war and its legacies from multiple perspectives. Their website contains photographs, flags, and online exhibits.

### **The Valley of the Shadow**

For a valuable resource on the Civil War, visit the University of Virginia's [Valley of the Shadow Project](#). The site offers a unique perspective of two communities, one Northern and one Southern, and their experiences during the American Civil War. Students can explore primary sources such as newspapers, letters, diaries, photographs, maps, military records, and much more.





# PUBLIC SALE

—OF—

## CHATHAM.

 THE undersigned, special Commissioners, of the Circuit Court of Stafford, will offer for sale at public auction, on the premises, (unless the REAL ESTATE be sold at private sale,) on **TUESDAY the 10th day of NOVEMBER next,**

if fair, otherwise, the first fair day thereafter, the

### **REAL ESTATE, THE PLATE, AND THE HOUSEHOLD AND KITCHEN FURNITURE,**

belonging to the estate of the late Judge John Coalter.

This estate, the residence of the late Judge Coalter, known as

### **CHATHAM.**

contains about

### **SEVEN HUNDRED AND TWELVE ACRES,**

lies on the Rappahannock river immediately opposite the town of Fredericksburg—extends up to the village of Falmouth, and communicates with Fredericksburg by a toll-bridge which the owner of the estate has a *perpetual right to use, TOLL FREE*, for all family and farming purposes. The soil is productive and improvable.—The meadow and table lands of superior quality.

 The site of the House is strikingly beautiful, with a Garden finely cultivated, and ornamented with very extensive terraces. The dwelling is of brick, in good repair, and has ten spacious rooms. There are also all necessary 'out houses' farm buildings, and a valuable

### **G R I S T M I L L,**

within a quarter of a mile of the town, on this estate.

There are also two good FISHERIES, from one of which an abundant supply of Herring and Shad for the farm are annually taken, and the other is readily rented out.

The advantages of every kind, which the owner of this handsome residence and valuable farm will enjoy, are obvious, and will be readily appreciated by any one visiting the estate.

The Real Estate, unless previously sold at private sale, will be offered at 10 o'clock in the morning, on the day of sale.

The terms of sale are as follows:

For the Real Estate, ten per cent of the purchase money in Cash, and the residue in three equal payments, at six, twelve and twenty-four months from the day of sale; and after the sale is confirmed by the court, a deed of trust on the said realty to be executed to secure the deferred payments, for which bonds with good personal security will be required at the sale.

For the personal property—all sums of twenty-five dollars and under, Cash—from twenty-five to fifty dollars on a credit of sixty days—over fifty and to one hundred dollars, on a credit of four months—and one hundred dollars and over that amount, on a credit of six months, on bonds with good security.

At the same time and place, and on the usual terms, the Executor of the late occupant of the estate, will sell the

Horses, Mules, Cattle, Sheep, Hogs,  
Crop of Corn,

A large supply of Fodder and wheat straw, and all the **FARMING IMPLEMENTS, &c.**

Persons desiring to purchase the Estate are referred to Messrs. FITZHUGH & LITTLE, Attorneys at Law, of Fredericksburg, Virginia.

JOHN R. BRYAN,  
H. B. TOMLIN.



