



The Pike Packet

News from The Snickersville Turnpike Association

March 2021



FIRST MASSACHUSETTS CAVALRY MONUMENT: A STORY OF REMEMBRANCE AND RECONCILIATION

On June 17, 1891, a small group of Civil War veterans and their family members gathered at a bend on Snickersville Turnpike just a few miles north and west of Aldie. The object of their attention was a gray monolith of Concord granite. Beautifully carved in the face of the stone was a horse's head over crossed sabres. The inscription:

FIRST MASSACHUSETTS CAVALRY
THIRD BRIGADE SECOND CAVALRY DIVISION
JUNE 17, 1863
ERECTED BY THE FIRST MASSACHUSETTS CAVALRY ASSOCIATION 1888

Many of those attending had traveled the long distance from their homes in Massachusetts. Sixteen were survivors of the battle that had taken place there twenty eight years earlier. It was the first monument to be raised on southern soil in memory of Union soldiers.

One of the fiercest cavalry battles of the Civil War took place where these veterans now stood. Historians would later claim that the clash on Snickersville Turnpike at the Furr farm was the "most severe experienced by any cavalry regiment in a single day during the war." Four long hours of repeated charges left the First Massachusetts decimated with 198 casualties – their names now etched in granite on the side of the monument. The Confederates suffered losses of greater than eight percent. J.E.B. Stuart called the engagement one of the most "sanguinary", or bloody, cavalry battles of the war. The Confederate commander of Virginia cavalry, Colonel Thomas Munford, remembered years after the war that his defensive position that day was "the best in fifty miles".

The property where the new monument now stood was owned by Dallas Furr, a forty-six year old farmer (and later a justice of the peace) who, during the war, was a private in the legendary John S. Mosby's Partisan Rangers.

(First Mass. Monument cont.)

Furr graciously donated the parcel of his land to the First Massachusetts Cavalry Association that was now home to the monument.

Major Charles Davis, who was wounded and taken prisoner at the battle, led the dedication ceremony. His remarks, delivered just twenty eight years after the clash, were conciliatory in scope and generous in nature. "On this field we left scores of dead comrades. Today, I lift my eyes to heaven and thank God we are permitted to live in a country enjoying the blessings of liberty and peace, where sectional feeling is unknown" and "where the glorious flag flows protectively alike over those who wore the blue and the gray." In concluding his remarks, Major Davis recited from the poem by Francis Miles Finch *The Blue and the Gray*:

"No more shall the war cry sever,
Or the winding rivers be red;
They banish our anger forever
When they laurel the grave of our dead!
Under the sod and the dew,
Waiting the judgment day;
Love and tears for the Blue,
Tears and love for the gray."

After the ceremony ended, the veterans walked the battlefield, easily recognizing the positions occupied by the different squadrons. They pointed to the burial sites of certain comrades who had fallen during the battle and spoke quietly of the extraordinary heroism they had witnessed there. Dallas Furr was presented a fine New England style Salem rocking chair for his generosity. Mr. Furr passed away in 1903. The farm remained in his family for almost 100 years.

Since 1994 Snickersville Turnpike Association has assumed maintenance responsibilities for the monument area. The Association raised funds to build a cobblestone-style pullover there. Interpretive signs have been erected and landscaping is performed on a regular basis. In 1995 STA applied for, and received, federal funds to restore two sites along the pike, one being the monument area. A second dedication of the First Massachusetts Cavalry monument took place in 2001, and cavalry

reenactors from Massachusetts were joined by their counterparts from Virginia for a wreath laying ceremony.

Today this peaceful, bucolic location on Snickersville Turnpike offers the opportunity for quiet contemplation. The violent history of the site is a cautionary tale that our country is stronger when united and that reconciliation transcends mere victory or defeat.

FIRST MASS MONUMENT'S TWIN AT GETTYSBURG

Another granite monument honoring the men of the First Massachusetts Cavalry can be found near the Sedgwick statue on the battlefield at Gettysburg. Almost identical to the one on Snickersville Turnpike, it was also created by the Boston Marble and Granite Company of Worcester, Mass. The distinguished bas relief of the monument's horse's head underscored by crossed sabres is an exact match. The monument at Gettysburg was dedicated on October 11, 1885 in a ceremony presided by the same Major Charles Davis who would do the honors almost three years later at the Snickersville Turnpike site.

The First Massachusetts, no doubt still recovering from their bloody encounter two weeks earlier at Aldie, were on detached duty at Gettysburg and saw no combat there. They were assigned to Sixth Corps Headquarters guarding prisoners. Ironically, Major Davis was, at the time of the Gettysburg battle, a prisoner himself somewhere in Virginia – a prisoner of the Confederate forces.



First Mass Monument at Gettysburg

ALDIE ASSEMBLAGE

A proposed residential development in the village of St. Louis has become, over a year later, a controversial and complicated land and cash swap between Loudoun County and a developer, ultimately involving the issue of the integrity of Aldie as a rural village.

The basis of the land swap is that Loudoun County owns the 6.3 acres in Aldie that accommodates the current Aldie firehouse, several small stores, outbuildings, dwellings, and the historic Aldie Tavern. This property was purchased by the county several years ago with the intention of building a new firehouse on the site. After near-unanimous opposition to the size and scope of the planned facility, a more acceptable location outside of the village was ultimately found and purchased in June 2019. The county was left with a parcel of land in Aldie that they did not want.

In October 2019, a separate contentious project was happening in St. Louis – a proposed development of 27 houses. In addition to concerns about groundwater capacity, St. Louis, like Aldie, has a rich historical past and the residents are proud of the character of their village. One of the first African-American hamlets in Loudoun, St. Louis was founded by freed slaves following the Civil War. The fear of being taxed out of their homes as development spread west has been, and continues to be, a real concern. Residents contended that a subdivision of the proposed size would be devastating to the village. The County agreed, but the developer had by-right zoning, the project was consistent with local laws, and the county's hands were tied. The solution, as the county saw it, was to purchase the undeveloped land in St. Louis and transfer the zoning rights to another of the developer's proposed projects – Aldie Assemblage – the same 6.3 acres owned by the county. Aldie Assemblage, now renamed Aldie Park, would become a large commercial center with shops, a brewery, multiple buildings, a tavern and a 162-car capacity parking lot - over 34,000 square feet of commercial space. A year later, a deal between the developer and the county was struck in a closed session meeting.

In essence, St. Louis would be spared their unwanted residential development, Loudoun County would be rid of their unwanted 6.3 acres in Aldie, and Aldie residents would inherit an unwanted oversized commercial development in the heart of their village. This is a still developing story. Stay tuned.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



During 2020, the effects of covid-19 caused delays in getting VDOT to repair the road edges at sharp turns along Snickersville Turnpike, and the cancellations of the Bluemont Fair, the Second Annual Turnpike Celebration at Whitestone Farms, and the Aldie Harvest Festival. We were able, however, to add to our website the wonderful newspaper article "A Scenic Drive in Loudoun County Virginia on the Snickersville Turnpike."

The County has begun a study to determine the need to relocate the current Philomont Fire Station eastward on the Turnpike to the Horse Show Grounds. We are working with the Loudoun Historic Villages Alliance and the Philomont Heritage Foundation to preserve the rural Philomont area by simply upgrading the existing Station.

There are seasonal traffic back-ups on the Bluemont end of the Turnpike due primarily to the area's breweries and wineries popularity. The Turnpike Association Board voted this year to oppose any enlargement of Whitehall Estate Lane at the Turnpike intersection, should the Estate be successful in obtaining approval for adding a winery and brewery to their current wedding charter.

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DID YOU KNOW?

In 1871 Philomont resident John James Dillon organized and financed the Philomont Coronet Band. Seven locals were taught to play the horn and actually became adequate musicians. They played ceremonial events and local concerts, even welcoming the first train to Purcellville in 1874. By the late 1880's, they had called it quits. Their ornate bandwagon, which survived the band, went missing after an appearance at the 1930 Apple Blossom Festival.

ROADSIDE CLEANUP - APRIL 18-24, 2021

The Snickersville Turnpike Association will be assisting Keep Loudoun Beautiful by picking up trash along historic Snickersville Turnpike. Your help is greatly needed. You are probably aware of our Adopt-a-Highway signs. Together, with the help of Bluemont Citizens Association (west of Yellow Schoolhouse Road) and Mountville Farms (and Mountville), the entire 14 miles of the Turnpike is covered. Once again, we are in need of volunteers to help make this year's effort a success. This year we're dedicating the week of April 18th to keeping the Pike clean. We urge everyone to spend some time picking up litter on your road.

Let's all pitch in and keep the Pike clean!