

Historical Significance of the Prince William 234 Associates (Watt) Tracts
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The area comprising the Prince William 234 Associates Tracts was at the time of the Civil War part of the “Rock Hill Farm” owned by John Cross. The farm contained 360 acres of which 250 acres was cleared land and 100 acres of that was under cultivation. Catharpin Run bordered this property to the north and it adjoined the Douglass farm (owned by Augusta Douglass but occupied by tenant farmer John Brawner) to the south. The land formed a part of what is known as Stony Ridge. The farm was behind Confederate lines throughout the Second Battle of Manassas.

In 1874 John Cross filed a deposition with the Southern Claims Commission to gain compensation for his wartime losses which amounted to \$1085. He was ultimately awarded \$870 which shows that he was able to demonstrate his loyalty to the Union despite having two sons that served in the Prince William Cavalry (Co. A, 4th Virginia Cavalry). According to the deposition made by Susan Cross, her father was “a Union man and was despised and abused by the neighbors in consequence.” Others confirmed that he had taken an Oath of Allegiance during the war.

A tradition persists that Cross was one of the local guides that directed General McDowell’s flanking column to Sudley Ford on the morning of July 21, 1861. However, in his deposition, Cross states that after First Manassas he was taken by the Black Horse Cavalry and carried before General Joseph E. Johnston who then questioned him as to whether he had helped the Union army. Cross was released after proving he had been at home that day.

It is believed that the Cross home served as a Confederate field hospital during the Second Battle of Manassas. Although corroborating documentation is elusive, the house would have been ideally situated for such use by Stonewall Jackson’s medical staff. A family cemetery is known to exist on the property and it is likely that there could also be unmarked graves in the vicinity for the mortally wounded Confederates who died before they could be transported to a more permanent general hospital further south like at Warrenton or Gordonsville.

After Second Manassas two of John Cross’s younger sons discovered a disabled 10-pounder Parrott rifle still on its carriage while exploring the neighboring Brawner Farm. A portion of the muzzle had blown off rendering the tube useless. The gun may have been abandoned on the field by Cooper’s Battery B, 1st Pennsylvania Light Artillery after a brief but fierce duel with several Confederate batteries on the morning of August 29. The Cross boys claimed the cannon as a war trophy, dragged it home and hid it for the duration of the hostilities. After the war they propped up the tube (the carriage having deteriorated) between two large boulders and fired it off

on special occasions. The tube remained on the farm after it was sold around 1905 to the Akers family but it disappeared under mysterious circumstances in 1965. The accompanying photo was taken about 1930. The man on the right is Barzillia R. Cross, a son of John Cross who likely had a hand in recovering the Parrott rifle in 1862



While actual combat cannot be documented on this acreage, its location on the periphery of the battlefield of Second Manassas still makes this land historically significant. The close proximity of the fighting would have an impact on the property. There is little doubt that troops under Stonewall Jackson occupied reserve positions in this area during the battle and Confederate wounded would have been carried back behind their lines to this vicinity for shelter. It is remarkable that John Cross, a staunch Union man, was able to ride out the storm and continue to live among his neighbors, the majority having southern sympathies.