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## Find Your Park Friday: Meg and Megan Take Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania NMP

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## **Abstract**

The Civil War Institute will be celebrating the National Park Service Centennial this spring with its brand new “[Find Your Park Friday](#)” series. Inspired by the NPS #FindYourPark campaign, the series will challenge our fellows to share their experiences exploring America’s national historical, cultural, and natural resources through trips and internships with the NPS. In our first post, CWI Social Media Coordinators Meg and Megan discuss their time interning at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

The Gettysburg Compiler, Civil War, Gettysburg, Civil War Memory, NPS, National Park Service, Find Your Park, NPS Centennial

## **Disciplines**

History | Military History | Public History | United States History

## **Comments**

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# THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

## ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

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### Find Your Park Friday: Meg and Megan Take Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania NMP

April 15, 2016

By *Meg Sutter '16* and *Megan McNish '16*

*The Civil War Institute will be celebrating the National Park Service Centennial this spring with its brand new “Find Your Park Friday” series. Inspired by the NPS #FindYourPark campaign, the series will challenge our fellows to share their experiences exploring America’s national historical, cultural, and natural resources through trips and internships with the NPS. In our first post, CWI Social Media Coordinators Meg and Megan discuss their time interning at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park.*



**How long did you spend at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park and what did you do while you were there?**

**Megan:** I’ve spent two summers at Fredericksburg; the first summer I was a Pohanka Intern and the second summer I was able to return as a seasonal employee. I’ve worked at almost all the

sites in the park in my two summers there. I've given tours at Chancellorsville, Fredericksburg, and the Wilderness. I've also spent time at the Stonewall Jackson Shrine and Chatham doing informal interpretation.

**Meg:** I was a Pohanka Intern at FredSpot from May 2014 to August 2014. I gave interpretive programs at the Fredericksburg Visitor Center and the Spotsylvania Exhibit Shelter and led tours daily. On the weekends I led the Children's Program with a fellow intern. We led four different programs including a cemetery program, a soldier's life program, a flags-and-signals program, and a regular Junior Ranger program which alternated each weekend.

### **What is your favorite site in the park and why?**

**Megan:** My favorite site in the park is the Stonewall Jackson Shrine. I'm not the biggest fan of Jackson, but the kinds of questions that come up there on a regular basis are fascinating. I love studying memory and at the Jackson Shrine, it is also possible to see the shift in memory over time and how history has been taught to different generations.

**Meg:** I did not spend a lot of time at the Jackson Shrine, instead I spent the majority of my time along the Sunken Road—especially because when we were interns, my address was the Sunken Road because we lived in the cemetery caretaker's house. I would say it is definitely my favorite site in the park. My favorite part of the day was giving tours along the Sunken Road. On each tour there was such a unique group of individuals who might have not known the difference between the Union army and the Confederate Army, were people who appreciated learning about a part of the battlefield they knew nothing about, or even locals who sometimes visited every day walking their dog and finally decided to go on a tour. I also spent my weekends along the Sunken Road giving Children's programs—and telling children to not climb on the wall. My conversations with people along this unique historic route reminds me that people still care about their country's past. It was also a delight to enlighten those from foreign countries about the specific site and its importance not just to the battle of Fredericksburg or the Civil War, but to America's history.

**Megan:** The Sunken Road is a close second for me. I think one of the coolest things about it is the ability to challenge preconceived notions about General Burnside and his capability. It is also really cool knowing, that up until fairly recently, the road was active! There are visitors that still come in who remember driving down the road as children. It just goes to show you how practices change over time and how the usage of resources in a park changes.

### **What do you think could be changed at the park?**

**Megan:** One of things that I would really like to see the park do before the next Centennial is expand their interpretation to include more than just the Civil War. While I am very passionate about the Civil War, I think talking about other eras in the park's history would enrich the visitor experience and the interpretation that is being done. One example is the history of the Civilian Conservation Corps, or the CCC, at Fredericksburg. The CCC camp at Spotsylvania helped re-

dig the trenches along the famous Mule Shoe Salient, something that many visitors to the park don't know. Helping visitors understand that the landscape that they are looking at is very different from 1864, or even 1900, is very important.

**Meg:** There are other places in the park along with the CCC sheds that have not been used to their full interpretive potential. For example, the exhibit shelters at the Wilderness and Spotsylvania are not visited as often as the two visitor centers at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville are. The park has struggled with how to raise interest in these two additional battlefield sites. Perhaps bringing in its local community could help expand interests in areas of the park. Public history is not just an educational tool, but also a way to bring communities together and connect them across cultural lines.

**Megan:** I think you're absolutely on the money here. One of the beautiful parts of history is that it can help us make sense of our present by understanding where we have come from. In many communities, this is a very important process, and National Parks can help further these movements within communities. Community-based programs, which the park already does, of course, are important in helping individuals not only understand their history, but take ownership of that history.

**Meg:** Exactly! But also, by giving people a sense of ownership in the interpretation of their local landscape, the NPS can help people find their park. Once they feel connected to their history, the community should be allowed a voice in the discussion of their past.

**What is your favorite memory at the park and why? Why do you feel this is your park?**

**How can others who haven't work at a National Park find their park?**

**Megan:** I feel like Fredericksburg is my park because for me, in many ways, it is where I became the person I am today. I know that sounds really silly, but in the two summers I've spent there, I've become a more independent, self-confident person because of the interactions I've had with visitors and my co-workers. Some of my favorite memories, as a result, have been with my co-workers and visitors, talking about history and exchanging ideas on the past. Nothing is better than when someone presents you with an idea that you had never considered before. These interactions have helped enrich my understanding of the nineteenth century and the Civil War, and that is priceless.

**Meg:** While I do not currently live in Fredericksburg and therefore am not part of the local community, I still proudly promote FredSpot as my park. I have cherished memories from my summer working at the park, and have acquired long-lasting friendships. I also feel a renewed sense of purpose. As a future history teacher my role will be to encourage younger students to explore their own past and take advantage of their access to historical resources like their local historic sites and parks.

**Megan:** I think it is really important that people know that Find Your Park is more than just "where have you worked" or "where have you been?" Find Your Park is about feeling

connected to a place, even if you only spent a few hours there ten years ago. I've always felt that it is more about the quality of the experience over the quantity.

<https://gettysburgcompiler.com/2016/04/15/find-your-park-friday-meg-and-megan-take-fredericksburg-and-spotsylvania-nmp/>