

# New Market Battlefield Petition to Restart Reenactments Reaches over 5,000 Signatures

To: The VMI Board of Visitors,

I'm writing to inform the VMI Board of Visitors that a petition was circulated in New Market and the State of Virginia to restart the annual reenactments on the New Market Battlefield State Park. The petition has over 5,000 signatures. The Petitioners are made up of reenactors, citizens, business owners and visitors of Virginia's Battlefields. On behalf of the Petitioners I hereby request the VMI Board of Visitors reconsider the annual battle reenactment on the New Market Battlefield.

The last reenactment was held in 2019. It was canceled in 2020 and 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic. There is no longer a public health reason to prevent the return of the battle reenactment. Other reasons given to cancel the event are diminishing numbers of participants and rising costs. It's true numbers have been declining at reenactments, but the interest is still there to have a good turn out. In Middletown, VA located at the top of the Shenandoah Valley is the Cedar Creek Battlefield. Last year they had over 1,500 preregistered reenactors for their annual battle reenactment. Many of the reenactors from the North and South Armies signed this petition at Cedar Creek. This reenactment helps to fund the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation.

Canceling the event due to rising costs and lost revenues were another area of concern. The cost side comes down to two main variables. The first and most controllable is overhead. Setting limits on all expenditures equal to preregistered guests and starting by invitation only can help. This relates to water, port-a-johns, hay for horses, security and parking to name a few. Events under 1,000 also have lower insurance cost so that part is a plus. Ultimately the event needs to pay for itself to be sustainable. The VMI Museum and future event planners need to work together to achieve these financial goals. This can be addressed at a future planning meeting. Another financial concern was lost revenues due to bad weather, hence the name MUD MARKET. Most Americans don't melt in the rain so drive on soldier. The "Field of Lost Shoes" is the iconic part of the battlefield's history. A little rain can be surreal as it brings into focus the line of foot prints that have faded away into the ground over time. Sell the story....

Permanently canceling the reenactment has negatively impacted business revenues in New Market. This comes from walking the streets of the town and having personal conversations with business owners. Some of these business owners generated 100's of signed petitions supporting a return of the reenactment. These events help to generate tourism throughout the year, even long after the battle is over. Repeat visitation is a positive factor for any business needing to generate revenues.

A news article by Mathew Fultz and Caleb Stewart "Shenandoah at War: Behind the Lines", on June 6, 2017 WHSV 3, talks about an economic study by the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation in cooperation with the National Park Service. The study references the Valley's 8 County National Historic District. This economic draft study found a direct impact of over \$205 million tourism dollars in relation to the Valley's National Historic District. Virginia is for Lovers of History. Love is spelled out on the battlefield with cannon parts. Love means support and protect?

This letter gives voice to over 5,000 Petitioners who want to see some attempt to return a reenactment to the New Market Battlefield. I will be more than glad to help make that happen.

My name is Dan Phelps I have been doing living history and civil war reenactments for over 20 years. I'm a NCWAA Artillery Instructor. I've helped with event planning, setup, safety zones and the battle plans. I also wrote the story "In the Footsteps of the Botetourt Artillery", published in the Fincastle Herald April 17, 2013

Follow-up letters after the VMI Board of Visitors meeting in September will be sent to the Virginia General Assembly Members in the Shenadoah Valley National Historic District.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter,

Dan Phelps  
Living Historian  
Buchanan,VA

