A Brief History

The year 1864 saw the turning point in the Civil War for the Valley. It was a complex year of multiple military operations that ended Confederate control of the Valley and wrought the near total destruction of its agricultural economy.

With Ulysses S. Grant's promotion to general in chief of all Union armies in March 1864, he lost no time in organizing a huge offensive across the entire front of the embattled states. In Virginia's Shenandoah Valley and the new state of West Virginia, Union forces were ordered to disrupt railroad and transportation networks and destroy Confederate forces and the economic and agricultural resources that supported them.

In May, a Federal army under Gen. George Crook advanced south through West Virginia with orders to cut railroad links from Virginia to the west. Union Gen. Franz Sigel was to move south through the Shenandoah Valley and meet Crook in Staunton. This would also prevent any Confederate movement out of the Shenandoah Valley to assault Grant's flank as it advanced south toward Richmond.

Sigel met defeat at New Market (May 15) in a battle with Confederate forces under Gen. John C. Breckinridge, reinforced by cadets from the Virginia Military Institute. Sigel was relieved and replaced by Gen. David Hunter.

In June, Hunter gained a victory in the rolling landscape at Piedmont (June 5), east of Staunton. With most Confederate resistance checked, Hunter moved south and burned the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington. Lee sent Gen. Jubal Early from the defenses of Richmond to confront the Federal threat. Early defeated Hunter at Lynchburg (June 17-18), on the east side of the Blue Ridge, and the Union army retreated into the mountains of West Virginia, leaving the Valley—and its pathway north—in Early's hands.

The Lynchburg Campaign: Exploring the Story Today

New Market, including areas of Luray and Page County
Pages 28-31

Virginia Museum of the Civil War
The story of the Civil War in Virginia and the Battle of New Market is told in this 300-acre battlefield park, 19th century farmstead, and museum, owned and operated by the Virginia Military Institute. Additional Virginia Civil War Trails signage on US 11 north of New Market describes the end of this battle.

Staunton, Waynesboro, and Augusta County
Pages 40-41

Battle of Piedmont
Trails signage describes Hunter's victory at Piedmont, which allowed him to continue south to wreak havoc in Staunton and burn buildings at the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington.

Staunton
Trails signage at the railroad station in Staunton describes Hunter's destruction of railroad infrastructure in the city after his victory at Piedmont.

Lexington and Rockbridge County
Pages 42-43

Lexington
The VMI Museum in Lexington interprets the role of the Institute during the Civil War, including its burning by Hunter.

Timeline of the Lynchburg Campaign

Early May
Sigel begins to move south in the Valley to meet Crook in Staunton.

May 15
Breckinridge's hastily-gathered Confederate army confronts and defeats Sigel at New Market.

Late May
Union leaders replace Sigel with Hunter, who begins to move south.

June 5
Hunter defeats Confederates at the Battle of Piedmont, east of Staunton.

Early June
Hunter continues south, looting Staunton and destroying much of the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington.

June 17-18
Hunter moves toward Lynchburg where he is defeated by Early's arriving forces.

Late June
Hunter retreats into the mountains of West Virginia.
If you can continue to threaten Grant I hope to be able to do something for your relief and the success of our cause shortly. I shall lose no time.

— Gen. Jubal A. Early to Robert E. Lee
June 1864
**A Brief History**

In an effort to divert Federal troops from Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's Overland Campaign north of Richmond, Gen. Robert E. Lee sent Gen. Jubal Early north through the Valley with instructions to strike all the way to Washington DC, if possible.

After his victory at Monocacy, Maryland on July 9, Early made limited attacks against Washington's strong fortifications. His assaults near the Federal capital caused the Lincoln Administration great consternation.

Failing to take the capital city, Early withdrew, crossing the Potomac into Virginia near Leesburg and thence to the Valley, followed by Federals under Gen. Horatio G. Wright. The Confederates confronted their pursuers along the western base of the Blue Ridge, defeating them at Cool Spring (July 17-18) on the Shenandoah River and then retiring to the relative safety of Fisher's Hill, south of Strasburg.

Wright, believing that Early was departing the Valley to rejoin Lee, began to move some of his units to join Grant at Petersburg, leaving a small force at Winchester under Gen. George Crook. Early attacked Crook just south of Winchester at Kernstown (July 24) and then his cavalry moved north and burned Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, in retaliation for the burning of Lexington. The July battles would be the Confederacy's last major victories in the region and would pave the way for a new, more destructive level of war in the Shenandoah Valley.

**Exploring Early’s Maryland Campaign**

**Winchester, including areas of Frederick and Clarke counties**

Pages 20-23

**Battle of Cool Spring**

Much of the Cool Spring battlefield is owned by the Holy Cross Abbey, which has a small visitor center — access to the battlefield area is by appointment only. There is a Virginia Civil War Trails sign on the west side of the Shenandoah River.

**Second Battle of Kernstown**

More than 300 acres of the Second Kernstown battlefield has been protected by the Kernstown Battlefield Association. This working farm is open to the public on weekends May through November.

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**Timeline of Early’s Maryland Campaign**

**June 18 - 21**

Following the Battle of Lynchburg, Early pursues Hunter as far as Salem and then turns north.

**Late June to Early July**

Early advances north, down the Valley, crossing the Potomac into Maryland.

**July 8**

Early ransoms the town of Frederick, Maryland.

**July 9**

Early’s advance on Washington is delayed by Federals along the Monocacy River, south of Frederick.

**July 11-14**

Early makes limited assaults on the defenses of Washington before withdrawing westward along the Potomac, crossing the river near Leesburg.

**July 14-17**

Confederates move west across Loudoun County and cross the Blue Ridge at Snicker’s Gap (along modern-day Va 7).

**July 17-18**

Pursuing Union forces engage elements of Early’s army along the Shenandoah River at Cool Spring and retreat.

**July 18 - 23**

After additional limited engagements, Confederates camp at Fisher’s Hill, south of Strasburg and Federals occupy Winchester.

**July 24**

Early attacks the Federals at Kernstown, south of Winchester, driving them north towards Harper’s Ferry.

**July 30**

Confederates burn Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.
Do all the damage to railroads and crops you can. Carry off stock of all descriptions... so as to prevent further planting. If the war is to last another year, we want the Shenandoah Valley to remain a barren waste.

— Gen. Ulysses S. Grant
August 1864
A Brief History  By the late summer of 1864, the Union had experienced the disaster at Kernstown and the Confederate burning of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant resolved to crush Confederate Gen. Jubal Early's army and destroy the fertile Shenandoah as a military granary for Lee's army. He reorganized several military districts under one commander and chose his aggressive cavalryman, Gen. Philip H. Sheridan, to lead this new army with the bulk of the Federal cavalry. Sheridan's instructions were to defeat Early and conduct a campaign of total warfare in the Valley.

Sheridan took command of his new army in early August and marched south. After weeks of watching—and occasionally engaging—one another, the two armies finally clashed. Sheridan delivered a shattering blow at Winchester (September 19). Early retreated and made an unsuccessful stand at Fisher's Hill (September 22) before withdrawing south, seeking the safety of the western slopes of the Blue Ridge.

The Union army proceeded south and Federal cavalry embarked on a two-week campaign of destruction to neutralize the Shenandoah Valley's agricultural base, this "breadbasket of the Confederacy." In what became known to Valley generations as The Burning, thousands of mills, barns, and farm buildings were put to the torch, stores of grain and livestock were destroyed or confiscated, and livelihoods were turned to ash.

Early's cavalry pestered the Union raiders from Staunton and Harrisonburg north until Sheridan routed the Confederates at Tom's Brook (October 9) and pursued them 10 miles south to Woodstock.

In a final attempt to destroy Sheridan's full army, then encamped between Strasburg and Middletown, Gen. Jubal Early suffered a smashing defeat at the Battle of Cedar Creek on October 19. Thereafter, the Confederacy lost control of the Shenandoah Valley and its bounty.

Timeline of Sheridan's Shenandoah Campaign

August 2
Sheridan is made commander of the new Army of the Shenandoah.

August – early September
Sheridan and Early alternately advance and retreat in the northern Valley, occasionally engaging one another, and reconfiguring their forces.

September 19
Sheridan attacks Early's divided army at Winchester, winning a victory that sends Early's army south to Fisher's Hill.

September 20-22
Early's army is defeated again at Fisher's Hill and retreats south through the Valley.

September 23 – October 8
Sheridan's army moves south all the way to Staunton before settling in at Harrisonburg. Union cavalry units systematically confiscate or destroy barns, mills, crops, and livestock throughout the central Valley.

October 9
In response to ongoing harassment by Confederate cavalry, Federal cavalry units turn and defeat their southern counterparts.

Mid-October
Federals encamp along the banks of Cedar Creek, between Strasburg and Middletown.

October 19
Early attacks Sheridan's Union army at Cedar Creek, winning much of the battlefield by early afternoon before Federals launch a counterattack that all but destroys Early's army for the remainder of the war.

To learn more about the history...

The Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation has published a companion to its booklet “If this Valley is lost, Virginia is lost!” Stonewall Jackson’s Valley Campaign. The second publication, “Give the enemy no rest!” Sheridan’s 1864 Shenandoah Campaign, is available in most visitor centers and many bookstores in the Valley. A list of retailers is available online at ShenandoahAtWar.org.

www.ShenandoahAtWar.org
Sheridan’s Shenandoah Campaign: Exploring the Story Today

The story of Sheridan’s campaign resonates in Valley families even today. Indeed, this history is especially compelling—not only because of its effect on the eventual outcome of the Civil War—but also because of its impact on the personal lives of the Shenandoah’s citizenry.

There are many places in the Valley that today tell the story of this dramatic campaign, from mill sites to battlefields to museums. As you explore the Valley, you may even encounter a resident who might share with you his or her own family’s experience during this dark chapter of the Valley’s history.

**Winchester, including areas of Frederick and Clarke counties**

Pages 20-23

**Third Winchester — Printed Battlefield Driving Tour**

A printed battlefield driving tour for this battle is available at most Civil War sites in the Winchester and Frederick County area, online at www.ShenandoahAtWar.org, and at the Civil War Orientation Center inside the Winchester-Frederick County visitor center.

**Third Winchester Battlefield — Redbud Run Trails**

A five-mile interpreted walking and biking trail installed by the Civil War Trust takes visitors through the area that saw some of the fiercest fighting of the battle. The Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation is also developing additional walking trails that will give pedestrians access to newly preserved areas.

**Stephenson’s Depot**

This area at the northern end of the battlefield is interpreted by Civil War Trails signs at the intersection of Old Charles Town and Milburn roads.

**Sheridan’s Field Hospital at Shawnee Springs**

Located along the Winchester Green Circle Linear Park is the site of one of the largest field hospitals of the Civil War. Signage describes the state-of-the-art system used to heat the almost 500 tents in this sprawling facility used during and after Sheridan’s campaign.

**Signal Knob, including Middletown, Strasburg, and Front Royal**

Pages 24-27

**Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation Headquarters and Hupp’s Hill Civil War Park**

The CCBF Headquarters in Middletown interprets the Battle of Cedar Creek, and Hupp’s Hill Civil War Park in Strasburg interprets Sheridan’s 1864 Valley Campaign. Both sites are operated by the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation.

**Belle Grove Plantation**

This antebellum plantation complex owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and managed by Belle Grove, Inc. interprets the pre-war story of this historic site as well as its role as a headquarters and local point of the Battle of Cedar Creek.
By degrees the whole line was thrown into confusion and I had no other recourse but to rally the Brigade on higher ground... There we took a stand and for hours successfully repulsed...

**Fisher’s Hill Battlefield**

Just south of Strasburg along US 11, travelers will encounter the first of several Virginia Civil War Trails signs that describe this “Gibraltar of the Valley” and the Battle of Fisher’s Hill. Following Battlefield Road west of I-81 takes you to Ramseur’s Hill, a one-mile walking trail at the site of the flanking movement that turned the tide of this battle. This site is owned by the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation, which is currently developing additional trails and interpretive signage for the battlefield.

**Tom’s Brook Battlefield**

Inside the Shenandoah County Park south of the town of Toms Brook, there is a Virginia Civil War Trails sign that describes this battle.

**New Market, including Luray and areas of Page County**

Pages 28-31

**Edinburg Mill**

In the town of Edinburg stands one of the few mills that survived The Burning. Trails signage tells its story.

**Civil War Trails Signage in Luray and Page County**

Located throughout Page County are a number of Virginia Civil War Trails roadside markers telling the story of Sheridan’s campaign—from his effort to cut Early off at Fisher’s Hill to the destruction of The Burning. A printed driving tour of Page County’s Civil War sites is available at the regional visitor center in downtown Luray.

**Rockingham, including Harrisonburg and areas of Page County**

Pages 32-35

**Silver Lake Mill**

Site of the old Daniel Bowman Mill, destroyed during The Burning. Trails signage here describes the “Breadbasket of the Confederacy” and the role of mills in the Valley’s agricultural economy.

**Downtown Dayton**

Virginia Civil War Trails signs describe the fear and retaliation during the dark days of The Burning.

**Site of the Death of Lt. John Meigs**

Here the son of the U.S. quartermaster was shot and killed. In retaliation, Sheridan ordered the wholesale destruction of not only the barns and mills of the surrounding area but also homes. Trails signage interprets this story.

**Lacey Spring**

This is the site of one of the final engagements of the war in the Valley—a December 1864 cavalry skirmish between Union Gen. George Custer and Confederate Gen. Thomas Rosser.

**Breneman-Turner Mill**

The Breneman-Turner Mill survived The Burning, despite being set on fire once and catching fire a second time. Trails signage tells the story.

[Interpretive signage along the walking trail at Ramseur’s Hill on the Fisher’s Hill battlefield]

[Edinburg Mill]

[The Heritage Museum in historic Dayton, home of the Harrisonburg-Rockingham County Historical Society]

[Site of the Death of Lt. John Meigs]
Winchester is in the northern, or lower, Shenandoah Valley. Formed by the Appalachians to the west and the Blue Ridge to the east, the Valley shelters the Shenandoah River on its journey down to the Potomac at Harpers Ferry.

The Valley’s natural corridor formed by the river also spawned the 19th century Valley Pike (modern-day US 11), along which both commerce and armies traveled. In contemporary times, Interstate 81 has replaced the Pike as the principal transportation route, bringing both opportunities and challenges to the interpretation of Civil War history.

To the embattled and hard-pressed South, the Shenandoah Valley was a land of plenty—filled with grain, dotted with mills and linked by road and rail with a main theatre of war across the Blue Ridge. The Valley also had abundant strategic options to offer to Confederate generals. Indeed, as Gen. Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson said, “If this Valley is lost, Virginia is lost.”

As a gateway to the Valley, Winchester became a battleground from the very beginning. Despite its great importance—or because of it—Winchester proved impossible to defend. The number of times the town changed hands during the war—perhaps more than 72 times—is today a matter of local pride.

Today, vestiges of the Civil War remain in Winchester and Frederick and Clarke counties. The voices of wounded and captured soldiers echo...
Fighting commenced quite early this morning and cannonading has been going on all day to the east of us on the Berryville Road, but a mile or two from town...

— Julia Chase, Winchester resident
September 19, 1864

through the county courthouse, where their graffiti is still visible. The courthouse is now a museum open to the public, as is the house that served as Stonewall Jackson’s Headquarters the winter before his famous 1862 Valley Campaign. Throughout the region, historic farms, homes, mills, and cemeteries, along with outstanding museums and interpreted sites, all help tell the powerful history and moving legacy of the war.

Visitors can walk the battlefields at Kernstown, Cool Spring, and Second and Third Winchester and learn how Jackson, Robert E. Lee, Jubal Early, and Philip Sheridan shaped the course of the war. Scattered throughout the region are the stories of the war’s effect on the Valley’s civilian population—how these families survived the personal and economic devastation that war brought, and how they rebuilt their lives in the years after the guns fell silent.

You may want to begin your visit at the National Historic District orientation center in the Winchester area (on the map, next page), which can help guide you to the host of sites where you can experience the region’s dramatic Civil War story today.

In the courtyard were two pieces of artillery, twelve pounders, taken from the enemy. In the vestibule lay thirteen dead bodies of United States soldiers and the courtroom was filled to its capacity with wounded...

— David Hunter Strother, Union staff officer
March 1862

Winchester Area

Battlefields

**First Kernstown**
March 23, 1862
Jackson’s Valley Campaign

**First Winchester**
May 25, 1862
Jackson’s Valley Campaign

**Second Winchester**
June 13-15, 1863
Lee’s Gettysburg Campaign

**Cool Spring**
July 17-18, 1864
Early’s Maryland Campaign

**Second Kernstown**
July 24, 1864
Early’s Maryland Campaign

**Third Winchester**
September 19, 1864
Sheridan’s Shenandoah Campaign
Visitor Information

Civil War Orientation Center &
Winchester-Frederick County
Visitor Center
1400 S. Pleasant Valley Road
Winchester, Virginia 22601
877-871-1326
Open daily – 9:00am to 5:00pm

Winchester Area Civil War Sites

1 ~ Old Court House Civil War Museum
Museum: 1840 courthouse used as prison and hospital during the Civil War. Exhibits include original soldiers’ graffiti on the courthouse walls and more than 3,000 artifacts.
20 N. Loudon Street, Winchester • 540-542-1145 $ www.civilwarmuseum.org • Open Wed-Sat, 10am-5pm; Sun 1-5pm

2 ~ Museum of the Shenandoah Valley
Museum: Complex that includes a historic house, six acres of spectacular gardens, and a museum that tells the story of the Shenandoah Valley’s art, history and culture. Museum offers 11 gallery rooms—including a Civil War room—as well as a museum store and a café.
901 Amherst Street, Winchester • 540-662-1473 $ www.shenandoahmuseum.org • Open Tues-Sun, 10am-4pm (Museum year-round; house and gardens March-November)

3 ~ Historic Old Town Winchester
45-block National Register historic district and pedestrian walking mall filled with shops and cafes.
www.OldTownWinchesterVA.com $

4 ~ National Cemetery
Cemetery: Final resting place for Union soldiers from the battles of Winchester, New Market, Front Royal, Cool Spring, Harper’s Ferry, Martinsburg, and Romney.
401 National Avenue, Winchester • 540-662-8535 www.cem.va.gov/CEM/cems/nchp/winchester.asp
Open daily during daylight hours.

5 ~ Stonewall Cemetery, Mt. Hebron Complex
Cemetery: Historic cemetery with gravestones dating to the 1760s, including Civil War soldiers, generals, governors, and patriots.
East end of Boscawen Street, Winchester • 540-662-4868
Open daily during daylight hours.

6 ~ Abram’s Delight
Interpretive Signage: Wartime experiences of the Hollingsworth family, who lived in Abram’s Delight, the oldest dwelling in Winchester.
1340 S. Pleasant Valley Rd., Winchester
7 ~ Newtown History Center
Museum: Interprets the history of this 250-year-old town: frontier settlement and growth, wagon industry and craftsman, and Civil War conflicts.
5408 Main Street, Stephens City • 540-869-1700
www.newtowndistrict.com
Open daily – 9:00am to 5:00pm
Jun-Aug: Tues-Sat 10am - 4pm; Sun 1pm-5pm. Sept-Nov: Wed-Sat, 10am-4pm; Sun 1pm - 5pm (*Open by appointment in winter.)

8 ~ Jordan Springs
Interpretive Signage: Centered on the nearby spring waters, site of an early 1800s resort that occasionally served as a hospital during the war.
Jordan Springs Road (VA 664), northeast of Winchester

9 ~ Clarke County Historical Association Museum
Museum: Features ‘Our Land Is Our Legacy,’ a multi-media exhibit telling 300 years of Clarke County history, land use and preservation, and rural culture.
32 East Main Street, Berryville • 540-955-2600 • www.clarkehistory.org
Open Tuesday-Saturday, 11-4 • Free

10 ~ Josephine School Community Museum
Museum: Housed in an 1882 school built by former slaves and free colored people, the museum tells the stories of 270 years of African-American contributions to the county.
303 Josephine Street, Berryville • 540-955-5512 • www.jschoolmuseum.org
Open every Sunday 1-3 pm and by appointment

11 ~ The Burwell-Morgan Mill
Historic Site: Built in 1785, one of the oldest operating gristmills in the county, grinding corn and wheat every Saturday from May through November.
15 Tannery Lane, Millwood • 540-837-1799 • www.clarkehistory.org
Open May-November: Saturdays 10-5, Sundays 12-5.

12 ~ Long Branch Historic House and Farm
Historic Site: House begun ca. 1810, with interiors finished in the 1840’s in elaborate Minard Lafever Egyptian-Revival style by Maj. Hugh M. Nelson, CSA.
400 acres, English gardens.
830 Long Branch Lane, Millwood • 877-868-1811
www.historiclongbranch.com
Open May-November, Wednesday-Sunday 1-4

13 ~ Stonewall Jackson Headquarters Museum
Museum: This home served as Jackson’s headquarters during the winter of 1861-62; museum houses one of the largest collections of Jackson memorabilia.
415 N. Braddock Street, Winchester • 877-868-1811 • 540-662-6350 • www.winchesterhistory.org
Open Apr-Oct, Mon-Sat 10am-4pm; Sun 12-4pm

14 ~ Winchester – The Valley Campaigns
Interpretive Signage: Overview of Winchester’s strategic importance during the war, and its role during the 1862 and 1864 campaigns
2 North Cameron St., Winchester

15 ~ Kernstown Battlefield – Rose Hill Farm
Battlefield Area: Site of the closing phases of First Kernstown; features one-mile walking tour with interpretive signs telling the battle’s story.
1850 Jones Road, Winchester • 540-662-1473 • www.firstkernstown.org/history/rose_hill.html
Site open on select days and by appointment

16 ~ Kernstown Battlefield – Pritchard Farm
Battlefield Area: 250-year-old, 315-acre farm was the center of the First and Second Battles of Kernstown. Visitor center, exhibits, and walking tours.
610 Battle Park Drive, Winchester • 540-869-2896 • www.kernstownbattle.org
Open May-Oct, Sat 10am-4pm, Sun 12-4pm.

Lee’s 1863 Gettysburg Campaign
Second Battle of Winchester Pages 10-11

17 ~ Second Battle of Winchester
Interpretive Signage: Describing action around three defensive forts northwest of the city.
US 522 (parking lot of the Virginia Farm Market), northwest of Winchester

18 ~ Star Fort
Interpretive Signage: Site of one of the last remaining defensive forts ringing the city of Winchester. Fortress Drive and US 522, Winchester

19 ~ Stephenson’s Depot
Interpretive Signage: Describing action at Stephenson’s Depot during the Second and Third Battles of Winchester.
US 11 at Old Charles Town and Milburn Roads, north of Winchester

Early’s Maryland Campaign
Battle of Cool Spring and Second Battle of Kernstown Pages 14-15

20 ~ Battle of Cool Spring
Interpretive Signage: Describes the July 18, 1864 Confederate victory when Union troops attacked Jubal Early’s rearguard during his withdrawal back to the Valley after threatening Washington, D.C.
Intersection of Castleman’s Road (Va. 603) and Va 7

21 ~ Holy Cross Abbey
Battlefield Area: Site of the Battle of Cool Spring. North of Va 7 on the west bank of the Shenandoah River in Clarke County • 540-995-1425
Abbey visitor center open year-round. Battlefield by appointment

22 ~ Third Winchester Battlefield – Redbud Run Trails Area
Battlefield Area: Site of some of the most dramatic fighting of the battle. 5-mile walking trail with interpretive signage.
Redbud Road, east of US 11N, Winchester • 800-298-7878

23 ~ Fort Collier Civil War Center
Battlefield Area: Focal point of one of the war’s largest cavalry charges; 10-acre site includes interpretive signage, earthworks, and historic Stone House.
922 Martinsburg Pike, Winchester • 540-662-2281 • www.fortcollier.com
Site open dawn to dusk for self-guided tours. House open by appointment.

24 ~ Sheridan’s Field Hospital at Shawnee Springs
Interpretive Signage: Site of the largest field hospital of the war, includes earthen remains of the state-of-the-art tent heating system.
Corner of Opequon Avenue and Hollingsworth Drive, Winchester • www.WinchesterGreenCircle.com

Self-guided Tours Free printed driving tours of the First Battle of Kernstown, First Battle of Winchester, and the Third Battle of Winchester are available at the visitor center and other Civil War sites. Walking tours of the downtown area are also available.
Confederate observers on Signal Knob at the north tip of Massanutten Mountain were in a position to view battles and movements in three counties throughout the Civil War. The Massanutten is a 60-mile-long, north-south range that splits the Shenandoah Valley along its spine from Strasburg to Harrisonburg. Front Royal on the east and Strasburg on the west are located at narrows formed by the mountain and the two forks of the Shenandoah River. These choke points channeled opposing armies’ movements and influenced commanders’ operational decisions throughout the war.

The terrain explains why some of the largest and most significant battles of the Valley’s 1862 and 1864 campaigns occurred within sight of Signal Knob.

In 1862, Confederate Gen. Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson used the Massanutten to screen his movement northward, successfully attacking a small Union garrison that was stationed at Front Royal, disconnected from the larger Federal force at Strasburg. Weakened, the northerners lost to Jackson again at Winchester two days later.

In the fall of 1864, Confederates under Gen. Jubal Early made a futile stand at Fisher’s Hill on the west side of Signal Knob after suffering a stinging defeat at Winchester just days earlier. After watching Union forces lay waste to the Valley’s bounty, Early’s cavalry attacked the Federals at Tom’s Brook but was forced to retreat. Finally, Early used Signal Knob as a vantage point from which to plan a surprise attack on Union forces encamped around Cedar Creek—an assault that came...