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Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park

Joan M. Zenzen
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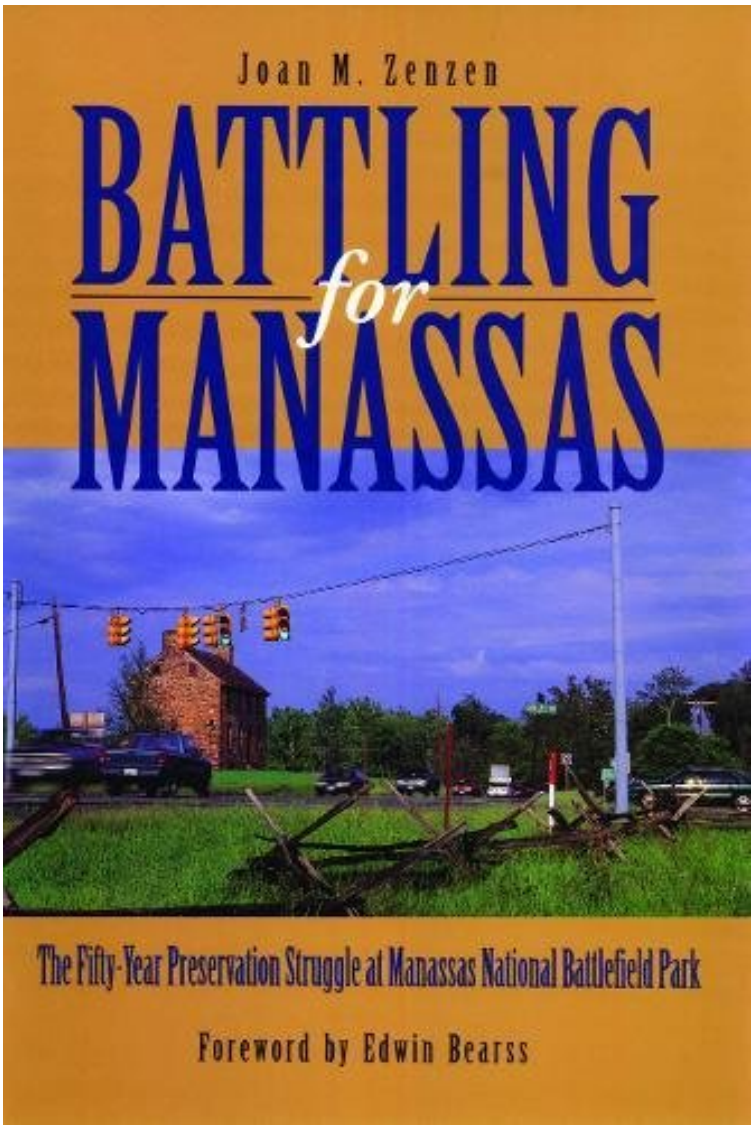

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Joan M. Zenzen : Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Interesting bookBy Roy HobbsAlthough this book feels a little dated

now and could use an update, it is still a must have for preservationists who are interested in the struggles that revolved around this battlefield.The current price (as of 6/06) of $41 is a little steep for a book of this kind. If you can get beyond the price, this is a quick read. Even at well over 200 pages, it's so interesting that I could hardly put it down and zipped right through it.Anyone familiar with the Civil War Preservation Trust would surely want to read a book from them in a similar vein as this one. I'm sure they have tons of stories to tell.3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Solid administrative historyBy A CustomerIn his introduction to Battling for Manassas, former NPS historian Ed Bearss correctly notes that this book ought to be "must reading" for public officials, developers, and preservationists who will eventually find themselves on opposite sides of debates about the preservation of land for historic sites, especially controversies that affect land near the nation's battlefields. Joan Zenzen has done a fine job of researching and writing this administrative history of Manassas National Battlefield Park. She has not only made sense of the paper records that flourish luxuriantly around government agencies, but she has also interviewed key players on both sides of the more recent of the many controversies that have swirled around the park. Zenzen's prose is serviceable if unexciting. A heavier editorial hand might have reduced the number of awkward phrasings and passive voices. Still, in literary style it ranks in the top five percent of National Park Service administrative histories, a notoriously pedestrian genre. A more serious criticism is that the book does not compare the land-use controversies at Manassas with those at other American historic sites, at least beyond limited analogies to Gettysburg and Fredericksburg/Spotsylvania. Perhaps that is just as well. Because it lies just outside the Beltway in an area inhabited by the rich, famous, and the politically potent, Manassas is hardly a reliable model for what might happen in similar circumstances at other American battlefields.

When the Disney Company ended months of controversy in 1995 by deciding against locating its historic theme park near the National Battlefield Park in Manassas, Virginia, advocates of historic preservation had won their own battle but perhaps not their war.Few places exemplify the problems of historic preservation as urgently as Manassas. The site of this Civil War battle, also known as Bull Run, has been encroached upon by plans for an interstate highway, a cemetery, a shopping mall, and two theme parks. As Washington continues its sprawl into the Virginia countryside, pressure will surely mount to develop the remaining open land surrounding the battlefield.The history of Manassas battlefield illustrates that the Disney controversy is only the latest in a long line of skirmishes over historic preservation and use. Battling for Manassas is a record of the struggles to preserve the park over the past fifty years. First commissioned as a report by the National Park Service, this book tells how park managers, government officials, preservationists, developers, and concerned citizens have managed to find compromises that would protect the site while accommodating changes in the surrounding community.Joan Zenzen's narrative places these highly publicized preservation conflicts within the framework of the park's history. She traces the efforts to preserve this Civil War battleground as it has slowly been surrounded by suburban development and discloses how issues involving visitors' facilities, recreation use of parkland, non-park-related usage, and encroachment on park boundaries by commercial interests have all come into play. Her study draws on interviews with many individuals who have been influential in the park's historyincluding park service officials, members of Congress, representatives of preservation groups, developers, and local officialsas well as on archival documents that help explain the nature of each controversy. She also shows that the Park Service's reluctance to conduct long-range planning following the controversy over Marriott's proposed Great America theme park contributed to later battles over development.Battling for Manassas is the story of how one site has garnered national attention and taught Americans valuable lessons about the future of historic preservation. It demonstrates to everyone interested in the Civil War that, with only 58 of 384 sites currently under Park Service jurisdiction, what has happened at Manassas might well occur on other historic grounds threatened by development or neglect.

Charting the fifty years of preservation attempts surrounding Manassas National Battlefield Park, Zenzen does a thorough job of showing how the Disney controversy is only the latest of many battles over the Civil War battlefield. . . . In charting these varied battles, Battling for Manassas convinces us of how our understanding of the past is colored by individual personalities and priorities, organizational resources, and institutional agendas.Barbie Zelizer, Journal of American HistoryWithout a word about tactics and strategy, Zenzen has written one of the years most important books relating to the Civil War. . . . If you read one book related to the Civil War this year, read Zenzens book and tell a friend.Mac Wyckoff, Pennsylvania Magazine of History and BiographyAn account of the fights to preserve the Manassas battlefields from development that provides a lesson for other historic sites. Battling for Manassas is a well researched, well written book. It is of great interest to anybody who is interested in battlefield preservation efforts for it provides an excellent overview of the process that has been successfully used at Manassas. It is of equal interest to anybody who has an appreciation for America's past for it most capably shows what is necessary to preserve our Civil history.War CourierThis impressive book will interest the many people who share America's extraordinary love affair with Civil War battlefields. It covers the earliest moves to create the Manassas National Battlefield Park up through the Disney controversy. The interpretations are fair and balanced, with many important insights that will be of value in

future efforts to combine preservation with responsible economic development.James M. McPherson, Princeton UniversityAbout the AuthorJoan M. Zenzen, who has a doctoral degree in American Studies, is a historian living in Maryland.