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**VICTORY IN SIGHT AT ANTIETAM**

*Iconic battlefield ‘a success story of historic preservation’*

By Michael Dresser

The lightning that killed or wounded 25,000 Americans in the rolling hills of western Maryland was over in about 12 grueling hours. But a century and a half after the bloodiest day in American military history, the struggle to preserve the ground where Union and Confederate soldiers fought the Battle of Antietam only now appears close to a declaration of victory.

As Americans gather to honor the sacrifice of those who fell Sept. 17, 1862 — as they do on the weekend and Monday on the 150th anniversary — they will do so at one of the nation's best-preserved Civil War sites.

Unlike many of the places where Union and Confederate forces clashed, Antietam officials recognize the opportunity to view the terrain much as it appeared at the time — within the visual clutter of the 20th and 21st centuries.

"It's a remarkable success story of historic preservation," said O. James Lighthi.

ter of the trust's Washington office. "At Antietam, the context for the battlefield also is conserved," said Bob Baracz, director of the trust's Washington office. "The public in 2012 or 2050 will have the opportunity to envision what happened here."

Antietam was a turning point. Coming after a string of Union defeats at the hands of Gen. Robert E. Lee, it was just enough of a victory to allow Abraham Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation from a position of strength. That act, freeing the slaves in the rebellious states, changed the character of the war and the country.

The battle was the culmination of a campaign in which Lee — fresh off his defense of Richmond and a brilliant victory at Second Manassas in Virginia — launched an effort to capture the key Maryland city.

The prospects for Antietam's preservation didn't always appear so hopeful. For three straight years, 1860 to 1863, the National Trust for Historic Preservation listed Antietam among its 12 most threatened historic places because of encroaching development. Now the National Trust considers Antietam a model of public-private cooperation to preserve historic land — not just on the battlefield, but in the surrounding area.

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