

## BRIEF HISTORY McPHERSON FARM FENCING RAILROAD GRADE

Although the railroad tracks had not yet been laid west of the town of Gettysburg in 1863, a substantial compacted roadbed for those tracks had been completed and graded, in many places bisecting farmers' fields. This happened to the northern fields of the Edward McPherson Farm, a place where much significant and intensive fighting occurred on the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg. This roadbed was used by many local residents as a "by-pass" around the Chambersburg turnpike as a means of avoiding tolls in the years prior to the battle. In order to protect his farm fields from wagons cutting across his fields between these two circulation features, the farmers generally constructed fencing where the railroad bed was at same grade as his adjoining farm fields. In addition, this fencing kept any of his own farm livestock from getting onto the rail bed and wandering into town or trespassing on other owners' property.

On the afternoon of June 30, two cavalry brigades arrived, drove off a Confederate reconnoitering party, and encamped for the night west and northwest of the town, with at least two regiments occupying the fields east of McPherson's Ridge and Buford Ridge. It was at this time the first portions of the McPherson fencing were dismantled, some for firewood and some perhaps for use in building temporary breastworks against additional Confederate advances from the west. It is unclear from the written record, but it most likely that the tenant farmer occupying the McPherson farm tried to first stop this dismantling of fencing but then tried to at least direct the troops to fencing that was least valuable or needed by him that growing season.

Written accounts by the soldiers who fought on this part of the battlefield describe many of the fences that crossed the McPherson fields. No soldiers—Union or Confederate—seem to have ever described those fences that enclosed the at-grade portions of the railway line. This is particularly curious in that considerable fighting occurred along the route between the first and second railroad cuts west of the town. It is likely that most, if not all, of the fencing in the low fields east of Buford Ridge (i.e., Reynolds Avenue) were removed for the cavalry encampment and for cavalry positions.

A mid-July 1863 Brady photograph of the McPherson Farm buildings was taken from a position a hundred or so yards south of them and shows not only the buildings but a part of the fields and woods beyond the Chambersburg Pike (today's Route 30). An enlargement of this photograph reveals that a portion of this at-grade fencing was still intact. This photographed portion of intact fence was immediately west of the famous Railroad Cut (where the bridge of Reynolds Avenue today crosses the deep embankment). This indicates that the entirety of this farmer's railway fencing was not destroyed before or in consequence of the battle but it also affirms that it did exist as part of the farm's pre-war agricultural needs. Indeed, all of these at-railway-grade worm fences were restored by the McPherson farmer soon after the battle for the same reasons they originally were erected before the battle. These restored agricultural fences appear in post-war photographs, including one picture incorporated in the park's current wayside exhibit at the Railroad Cut.

In summary, some of the fencing that enclosed the McPherson fields along the railway grade was dismantled before the fighting while some of the same fencing along the rail route was not dismantled and survived the fighting virtually intact. The park will therefore represent these 1863 dismantled fence lines as it has on other parts of the restored battlefield landscape—by removing several panels of fence at regular intervals while leaving remaining panels intact. This represents that there was a fence there prior to actual combat but it had been removed preparatory to the combat. This interpretive technique already has been used in the fields of the Trostle Farm east of the Emmitsburg Road and in the fields to the rear of Cemetery Ridge east of Hancock Avenue.

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