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Randy,

It has sadly come to my attention that a demolition permit has been requested to raze the historic Hybla property near Wrightsville, Pennsylvania. This property, dating to the earliest days of the United States, figured prominently in the Underground Railroad movement and may, in fact, have been one of the earliest, if not THE earliest properties in all of York County to have been a station on the Underground Railroad. William Wright of Columbia is generally credited as being one of the first Quakers in the Susquehanna River region to assist escaped slaves near the turn of the 19th century. His sister and brother-in-law, Susannah and Jonathan Mifflin, lived in the Hybla house at the time and were partners in smuggling fugitive slaves across the river to William Wright and other abolitionist-leaning Lancaster Countians. I cover their activities, as well as their son Samuel Wright Mifflin and their friend and boatman Robert Loney, in my groundbreaking book *The Ground Swallowed Them Up: Slavery and the Underground Railroad in York County, Pennsylvania* (York, PA: York County History Center, 2016).

Not only was Hybla an important and historic stop on the Underground Railroad, the house and its immediate grounds were a key part of the June 28, 1863, Civil War battle at Wrightsville. Famed General Robert E. Lee had led more than 70,000 Confederate soldiers into south-central Pennsylvania in mid-June of that year in an effort to 1) win a victory against the Yankees on Northern soil 2) secure huge quantities of food, supplies, flour, beef cattle, and forage for his army and horses to prolong the war 3) divert Union attention from Vicksburg and 4) attempt to capture Harrisburg, thinking that the public outcry from Pennsylvanians and across the North would force Abraham Lincoln to the negotiating table, perhaps securing long-desired Southern independence.

To capture Harrisburg, General Lee sent two powerful columns of some of his best troops toward the Susquehanna River. One, under Lt. General Richard Ewell, marched through Chambersburg and Carlisle toward Mechanicsburg and what is today Lemoyne. The other division, under Major General Jubal Early, followed today's Lincoln Highway/US 30/PA 462 from Fayetteville east through Gettysburg to York. General Early desired to capture and seize the massive covered bridge between Wrightsville and Columbia to facilitate crossing his troops into Lancaster County for the anticipated march on Harrisburg's unguarded rear entrances. Early sent Brigadier General John Brown Gordon, one of the finest officers in the Army of Northern Virginia over the course of the war, to seize the bridge.

About 5:30 p.m. on Sunday, June 28, 1863, Gordon launched his attack with nearly 2,000 Rebel soldiers on the horseshoe-shaped earthworks, rifle pits, and entrenchments that surrounded Wrightsville and the entrance to the vital bridge. The defenders, more than 1,500 Pennsylvanians (including a company of more than four dozen African-American home guardsmen from the river region), resisted Gordon for as long as possible and then withdrew across the bridge. The northernmost of the Union lines were on the Hybla property (then owned by Jacob Huber and his family). General Gordon, as the Pennsylvania state militia retreated, moved two long-range artillery pieces to the hill on which the Hybla stone house sits, and began to bombard Wrightsville.

His Virginia artillerymen fired 40 explosive rounds at the retiring militia, the town itself, and at the distant covered bridge as the 31st Georgia Infantry and two other veteran Georgia regiments swept across the Hybla property in long lines of battle, shooting at the Pennsylvanians. Four Columbia civilians, under army orders, burned the bridge to prevent Gordon and Early from crossing the river.

Both Confederate generals greatly lamented the loss of the bridge (and subsequent inability to attack Harrisburg from Lancaster County). Jubal Early “regretted very much” Gordon’s failure to secure the bridge. With nothing to retard his progress, he claimed he would have taken his division across the Susquehanna, cutting the Pennsylvania Railroad before marching on Lancaster. After laying that town under contribution, he would have attacked Harrisburg in the rear while Ewell attacked the front. In the worst contingency, Early planned to mount his division from the immense number of horses taken across the river by the refugees, and then move to the west, destroying the railroads and canals before returning to safety. He lamented, “This project, however, was entirely thwarted by the destruction of the bridge, as the river was otherwise impassable, being very wide and deep at this point.”

The Union commander, Medal of Honor recipient Colonel Jacob G. Frick, believed the fighting at Wrightsville had thwarted Robert E. Lee’s plans to take Harrisburg, perhaps changing American history forever. He penned in 1892, “I was fully impressed with the belief at the time that this bridge was General Lee’s objective point, and that it was to become the highway of the Confederate army to reach the centers which enabled the Northern army to maintain its position in the field by cutting off the supplies by capturing the eastern ports and plant the seat of war in Pennsylvania instead of Virginia.”

Much of the old Civil War battlefield of Wrightsville has been lost to commercial development and now is unavailable for historians and authors to interpret for future generations. The largest remaining piece, the Hybla property, needs to be preserved and protected as a memorial to this part of the Gettysburg Campaign. I cover the historical significance of this action in my best-selling book, *Flames Beyond Gettysburg: The Confederate Expedition to the Susquehanna River, June 1863* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2011). I have discussed the significance of this bridge and the fighting on the Hybla property at Civil War conferences, seminars, and Round Table meetings in Illinois, Tennessee, Louisiana, New York, several New England states, Ohio, West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia, and other places to share my research.

The Hybla property has never had a systematic survey of the Union lines to properly locate them, recover any historical artifacts of interest to the local historical societies, and to record their exact positions for posterity. Likewise, the hill on which the Hybla house stands needs an archaeological investigation to pinpoint the location of the artillery pieces. Destruction of these hallowed grounds would preclude that effort.

In summary, I stand with the York Civil War Round Table, the Lancaster Civil War Round Table, and many other Civil War preservation groups to ask that Hybla be spared and saved for proper historical interpretation.

Yours truly,

Scott L. Mingus, Sr.