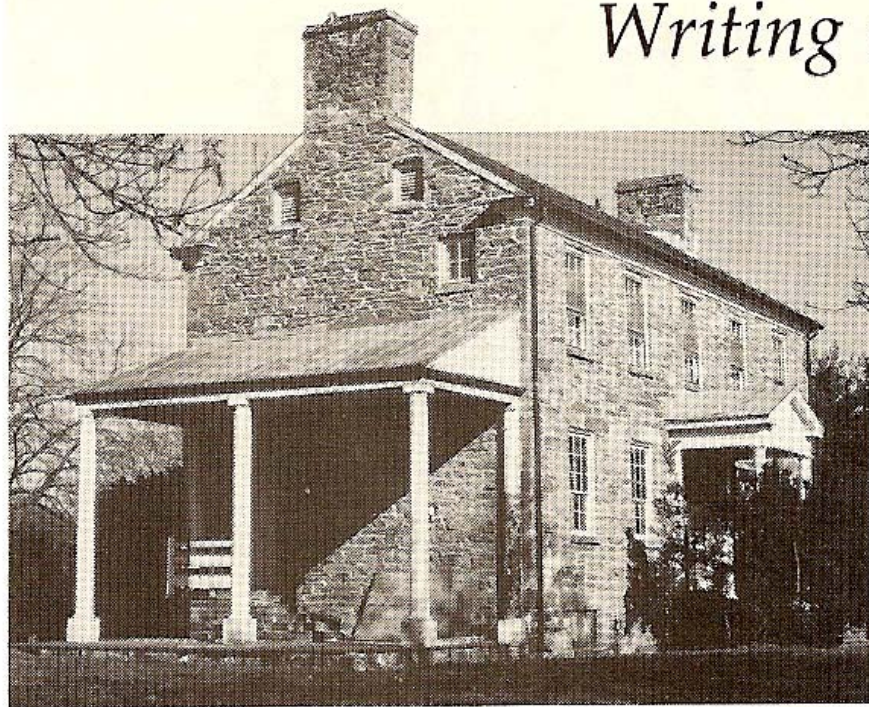


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## Writing on the Wall



*Ben Lomond house, Manassas, Virginia*

Manassas, Virginia, residents who assumed that all their Civil War ghosts had been discovered were surprised when a local group uncovered still another piece of history. "Some workers started peeling off old wallpaper in the Ben Lomond house, and there it was—graffiti left by Union soldiers," explains Roger Myer, president of the Prince William Cultural Arts Federation. That initial discovery led to similar finds throughout the house, which served as a field hospital in both bat-

MIRIAM VAN SCOTT

tles fought at Manassas (also called Bull Run), in 1861 and 1862.

"We suspected that the writing was genuine," says Myer, "because former residents of the house had found Union documents there." Two names, John M. Slater and Wallace Cranston, were positively identified by cross-referencing Civil War records, which showed that both had fought as Union soldiers in Manassas. Firemaster, a local company specializing in historical restoration, is now using a variety of methods to salvage what remains of the century-old message. So far, several names, regiment titles, and part of a will have been recovered.

When renovations are completed, the Ben Lomond house will provide office space and rentals to area groups. "We're going to frame the graffiti," says Myer, "then finish off the rest of the wall. It will be an unusual added attraction." And an excellent way for future generations to read messages from the past.

—Miriam Van Scott

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