

PRESS RELEASE (March 02, 2026)



Artillery Shell from the Battle of Shepherdstown Found to be Safe

The Battle of Shepherdstown (September 19-20, 1862) brought some extra excitement to our area on Saturday, February 28, 2026. The Chief Detectorist Bryan Landacre of the Shepherdstown Battlefield Preservation Association (SBPA) was metal detecting in a field on the Osbourn Farm in Shepherdstown. The farm was purchased several years ago through the efforts of the SBPA, American Battlefield Trust, Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission, and the State of West Virginia as it is located in the core battlefield area that was defined by the National Parks Service Special Resources Study in 2014.

Less than 10 minutes into his exploration, the metal-detector sounded a strong hit, indicating a substantial piece of solid metal. There, at a depth of 8-10 inches, Landacre found what appeared to be an unexploded artillery shell, heavily encrusted with rust and dirt. He estimated the shell to be about 8" long, 3" in diameter, and weighing approximately 10 lbs. He immediately sent text messages to SBPA President Dr. Mike Nickerson and SBPA Board member Dr. Sam Stribling about the discovery and "Look what I just found! An artillery shell!". Not knowing whether it was a live shell, Nickerson notified several SBPA members for advice on how to proceed, notably historians Dr. Tom Clemens and Kevin Pawlak, who suggested contacting the Jefferson County Police. Within the hour the historic property was inundated by seven Sheriff vehicles and a long-ladder fire truck. The officers ensured everyone was safe, isolated the relic and contacted the WV State Police Explosives Response Team. After discussion with Dr. Nickerson, it was scheduled that a State Explosives Expert would perform a detailed examination of the artifact the next morning to determine whether it was a potentially live round and whether it posed any danger.

The next morning, Sunday, March 1, he concluded the shell was a solid shot, having no cavity and/or explosive material. Further investigation revealed it was a Union 10 pound Parrot gun shell, likely fired from a Union artillery battery on the Maryland ridge above the C&O Canal.

This important find is part of an ongoing effort to preserve the history and understanding of the Battle of Shepherdstown by studying artifacts from the battlefield area, including properties now owned by the Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission, under farmland preservation easement by the WV Farmland Protection Board, preserved from development by the Land Trust of the Eastern Panhandle, and through the support of local private landowners. An artifacts collection and database have been created and are a dynamic and growing project, currently holding over 100 items ranging from bullets, artillery fragments, pocketknives, buckles, buttons, horseshoes, and various pieces of farm equipment. These have corresponding locational coordinates. Selected artifacts from this collection will go on display in April 2026 at the Historic Shepherdstown Museum in the Entler Hotel. To learn more about SPBA, visit <https://shepherdstownbattlefield.org>.

Donations from Battlefield Supporters make these efforts possible. Plans for 2026 include expanding visitor access to the Battlefield Park areas by improving parking, creating walking trails, and through the installation of wayside exhibits. Thank you to all our supporters!