



The Newsletter of the Bull Run Civil War Round Table — Vol. XXXI, Issue 4, APRIL 2024

**HISTORIAN AND RENOWNED
TOUR GUIDE JAMES
ANDERSON SPEAKS ON
"ELIZABETH VAN LEW: UNION
SPY IN THE HEART OF THE CON-
FEDERACY" AT THE APRIL 11th,
2024 MEMBERSHIP MEETING**

By Mark Trbovich

During the Civil War, hundreds of women, Union and Confederate, acted as undercover agents, willing to risk their lives to help their cause. Unlike many enthusiastic but amateur female spies, who were more effective at self-promotion than espionage, Van Lew was arguably the best "self-taught" spy North or South – male or female. Operating out of her home in Richmond, she created a highly effective espionage ring, risking her life and livelihood in the service of her country – the United States of America. We are happy to have our speaker, who visited in July 2023, with an outstanding Civil War intelligence lecture, visit us again.

Jim Anderson has a BA in History from Rhodes College and an MA in History from the University of Memphis. After serving three years as an Air Force Intelligence officer, he was recruited by the CIA. His thirty-year career included eleven years overseas in the Middle East, Europe and the Far East. In retirement, Jim started his own leadership and management training company, which features tours of Civil War battlefields for a wide variety of leadership teams from government, military, private industry, and law enforcement. In retirement, he lectures at the Osher Life Long

MEMBERSHIP MEETING

THURSDAY, April 11, 2024

6 P.M. Social Hour

**7 P.M. In-person at the
Centreville Regional Library
& Streamed on Zoom &
Face Book Live**

GUEST SPEAKER:

James Anderson

TOPIC:

**"Elizabeth Van Lew: Union
Spy in the Heart of the
Confederacy"**

Learning institute at George Mason University and to a wide variety of local historical organizations. He is a member of the Virginia Piedmont Heritage Area Association, the District of Columbia Civil War Roundtable, and member and past board chairman of the Friends of Ball's Bluff Battlefield. He currently lives in Ashburn, Virginia.

Come join us early at our April 11th, 2024, Membership Meeting to have an opportunity to chat with Jim and your colleagues before the meeting begins. Doors open at 6:00 PM; hope to see you there.

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The **Bull Run Civil War Round Table** publishes the **Stone Wall**.

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For meeting dates and other information, please visit the Web site: <http://bullruncwrt.org>

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For the **May 2024 issue**, e-mail articles by **April 29th** to the editor, Don Richardson, at: don.richardson@erols.com

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and e-mail ads by **April 29th** to Don Richardson at: don.richardson@erols.com

UPCOMING MEETINGS

April 11 James Anderson - "Elizabeth Van Lew: Union Spy in the Heart of the Confederacy"

May 9 Chris Mackowski - "The Battle of the Wilderness, May 1864"

June 13 Brad Gottfried - "The Maps of the Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse, May 1864"

July 11 Jonathan Noyalas - "The Battle of Cool Springs, July 1864"

August 8 Doug Crenshaw - "Fort Harrison and the Battle of Chaffin's Farm"

September 12 Melissa Weeks - "Rendezvous with Destiny: Gen. J.E.B. Stuart at Spotsylvania Courthouse"

October 10 Sarah Bierle - "What If Rienzi Stumbled? A Different Look at the Battle of Cedar Creek, October 1864"

November 14 Gene Schmiel - "The Battle of Nashville, Tennessee, November 1864"

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THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Kim Brace

I first came to the Washington DC area back in 1969 to go to college (AU) and to get as far away from my San Diego home and parents as possible. It seemed to this young developing mind that DC was the center of the universe and it certain was for someone involved in journalism, politics and election administration. But as I got older I discovered history, both World War II (my diving partner and I discovered a German submarine off the North Carolina coast) and finally the Civil War (but it took me five years of living just off Wolf Run Shoals before I realized what had happened in my back yard 150 years before).

This thirst for knowledge about the War Between The States lead me to the Bull Run Civil War Round Table. While there are several hundred Round Tables around the nation, we are unique because so much of the war took place in our back yard and we get to study it in person. This is certainly the case in the tour our Round Table conducted last month on the Confederate Military Railroad in Manassas and Fairfax County. A more complete description of the day's activities occupies over half of this month's newsletter, and reflects both the historic research conducted beforehand by Blake Myers and Jim Lewis, and also the many steps undertaken by over 30 RT members that Saturday. I unfortunately was away that day on travel, but I hope we'll do the tour again, maybe in the fall when the weather is cooler. That's one of the advantages of having history all around us.

Four years ago as the country shut down with COVID and people discovered

the advantages of Zoom, I learned about the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) program at George Mason University. Designed for our senior citizens (yes, that's me too), the program has over 100 courses each quarter on a wide variety of subjects and interests. Naturally I gravitated to the history classes, among which they had a number devoted towards the Civil War. Our own Jim Lewis has taught several courses for them. I also signed up to courses lead by Jim Anderson, including several tours he conducted to places like Antietam. Jim's detailed knowledge of different battles and Civil War events and topics lead me to recommend Jim to Mark Trbovich, the Round Table's scheduler for speakers to our group. Jim was able to fill in last year when one of our regular speakers had to cancel at the last minute. Jim will now be a regular for us, this Thursday speaking on Elizabeth Van Lew: Union Spy in the Heart of the Confederacy. You won't be disappointed.

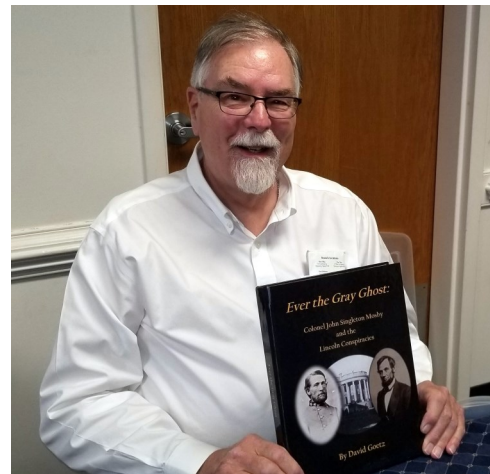


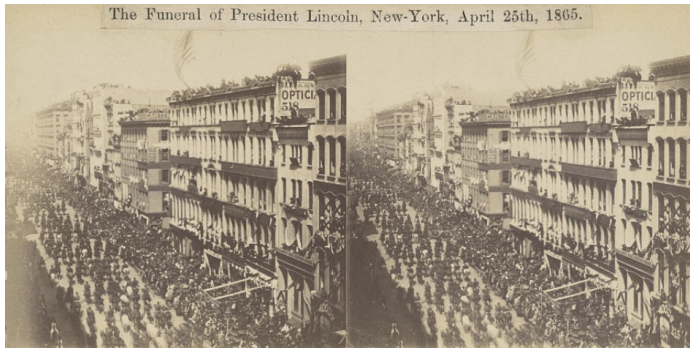
Photo: Janet Greentree

In March we had the privilege of hearing from David Goetz about his theories of the role of John Mosby in the Lincoln Conspiracy. If you missed it, the presentation is on our Facebook page and well worth listening to. Just another benefit of your Round Table.

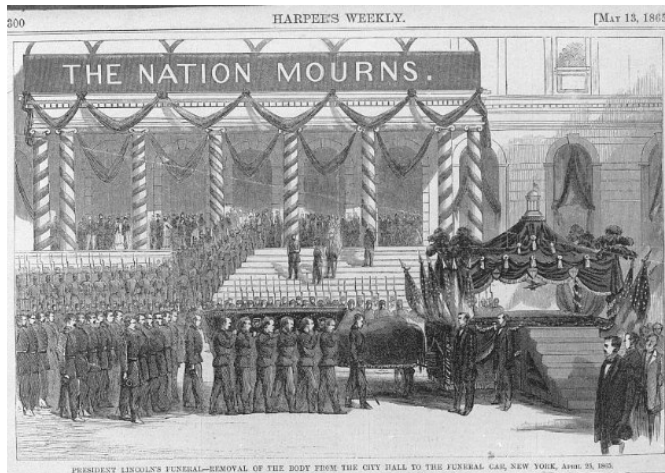
FUNERAL OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Photos: Library of Congress

April will always hold the memory of the tragic assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Here are just a few of the many images from that time.



Funeral procession, New York City, April 25, 1865



Casket moved from City Hall to the funeral car



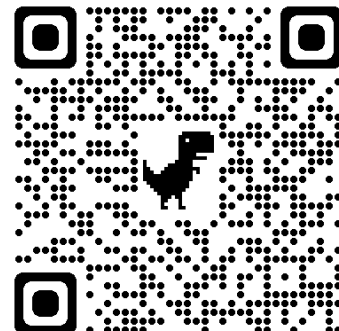
Funeral Car, Alexandria VA

SUPPORT BRCWRT ACTIVITIES

The Bull Run Civil War Round Table is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization that relies on your donations to continue our excellent programs and initiatives throughout the year. There are many select programs to donate to, including: the BRCWRT Scholarship Fund, Preservation efforts, Civil War Trails sign preservation and maintenance, educational programs, and of course the General donation category (which the Round Table uses as a discretionary fund to offset various expenses, to help keep our membership dues at a reasonable rate). Please consider your Round Table for tax-deductible donations every year. We are a special organization and appreciate our members very much.

There are a number of ways to make a donation. On the BRCWRT website, click the link labelled "Renew/Donate" and select the link at the bottom of that page. Alternatively, you can give a check to our Treasurer at a membership meeting, or mail it to: BRCWRT Treasurer, PO Box 2147, Centreville VA 20122. Make checks payable to BRCWRT, and be sure to note whether it is for the Scholarship Fund, Preservation Fund, or the General Fund.

Finally, you can scan this QR code with the camera on your smartphone to make a donation.



Bull Run Civil War Round Table



Upcoming 2024-2025 Program of Events

Date	Event
April 11	Monthly Meeting Speaker: James Anderson - "Elizabeth Van Lew: Union Spy in The Heart of the Confederacy"
May 9	Monthly Meeting Speaker: Chris Mackowski - "The Battle of the Wilderness, May 1864" Anniversary Celebration - CAKE!
June 13	Monthly Meeting Speaker: Brad Gottfried - "The Maps of the Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse, May 1864"
June 22	Spring Tour: "Battle of Spotsylvania" - Tour Guide Greg Mertz (rain date is June 29th)
July 11	Monthly Meeting Speaker: Jonathan Noyalas - "The Battle of Cool Springs, July 1864"
August 8	Monthly Meeting Speaker: Doug Crenshaw - "Fort Harrison and the Battle of Chaffin's Farm, 1864"
September 12	Monthly Meeting Speaker: Melissa Weeks - "Rendezvous With Destiny: Gen. J.E.B. Stuart at Spotsylvania Courthouse, 1864"
October 5	Fall Field Trip: "Battle of Cedar Creek" - Tour leaders Blake Myers and Jim Lewis (rain date October 26th)
October 10	Monthly Meeting Speaker: Sarah Bierle - "What If Rienzi Stumbled? A Different Look at the Battle of Cedar Creek, October 1864"
November 14	Monthly Meeting Speaker: Gene Schmiel - "The Battle of Nashville, Tennessee, November 1864"
December 12	Monthly Meeting Speaker: Scott Patchan - "Shenandoah Summer: The 1864 Valley Campaign"
January 9, 2025	Monthly Meeting Speaker: Melissa Winn - "Sideways Sites: Civil War History In An Indirect Way"
February 13, 2025	Monthly Meeting Speaker: Eric Buckland - "Mosby: When The Story Ended, The Legend Began"
March 13, 2025	Monthly Meeting Speakers: Dawn Diehl & Linda Harrison - "The Healing: Conversations with Civil War Nurses"

Monthly Meetings in "Black" Tours/Field Trips & Special RT Events in "Red" County or outside sponsored events in "Green"

CENTREVILLE MILITARY RAIL ROAD TOUR AFTER ACTION REPORT

By Jim Lewis and Blake Myers

All Photos by Jim Lewis unless noted otherwise

On March 16, 2024, a beautiful (not a cloud in the sky) and brisk Saturday morning, thirty three enthusiastic BRCWRT members and friends gathered at the Manassas Visitors Center (located in the historic Manassas railroad depot) for BRCWRT's Centreville Military Rail Road Tour. Tour guides Blake Myers and Jim Lewis greeted tour participants as they arrived and provided each a tour hand-out packet (printed in color), including several maps which received many positive comments. The timely arrival of an Amtrak train just before the tour began enhanced the setting for what was to follow.

By design, the tour was front-loaded, with Stop 1, the Harris Pavilion, being the location to provide information on what the immediate area looked like in 1861, why the CMRR was built, and how the construction was planned and conducted. The remainder of the tour consisted of stops at sites along the route of the CMRR, including sites containing remnants of the 165-year-old railroad bed, and one additional stop of special interest.

After greeting tour participants and providing an overview of the tour, Blake led the group on a short walk across the railroad tracks to the Harris Pavilion. Once there, Blake described the immediate area as it would have looked in 1861. The town of Manassas didn't exist, the nearest home was Tudor Hall, the Orange and Alexandria (O&A) Railroad ran along the current Norfolk Southern railroad bed, and Manassas Junction, linking the Manassas Gap Railroad from the Shenandoah Valley to the O&A Railroad, was just 'upstream'. Blake corrected the contention of many that Manassas Junction was located near the current railroad depot. The junction was actually located approximately 1/4 mile southwest up the track - where today's Norfolk Southern Manassas Depot is located, along Stonewall Road.



Blake Myers briefs the Tour Group at the Manassas Railroad Station

(cont on page 7)

CENTREVILLE MILITARY RAIL ROAD TOUR

Blake then discussed the reason for, and the purpose of, the CMRR. He explained that following the Battle of 1st Manassas/Bull Run on July 21, 1861 and the Federal army's retreat back to the defenses of Washington City, the Confederate Army of the Potomac, commanded by Brigadier General Beauregard, and the Confederate Army of the Shenandoah, commanded by Brigadier General Johnston, remained in the area between Manassas Junction and the village of Centreville – awaiting, and in anticipation of, potential Federal force advances. Gen. Johnston decided to position the Confederate armies along the plateau running from Centerville to Union Mills – a key, elevated plateau that enabled observation of any Federal advance from Washington or Alexandria -



Blake describing the area in 1861, and the reason for and purpose of the CMRR.

with units guarding key fords and crossing sites of the Potomac and Occoquan Rivers. In October and November of 1861 these infantry, cavalry, and artillery units, consisting of approximately 44,000 soldiers, their supply trains and their horses and mules began occupying the town of Centreville, the Centreville plateau, and camps guarding the fords and crossing sites, with a primary focus on constructing winter huts and fortifications.

From a supply perspective, Centreville was near (6 miles to the northeast of) Manassas Junction and its supply depot – a key consideration given the armies consumed 120,000 pounds of provisions per day for the soldiers, and 26 pounds of forage per animal/per day. This normally would not present a problem, but the fall and winter of 1861-62 was one of the wettest that Northern Virginia had experienced in years. The heavy rains resulted in overflowing streambeds and incessant mud that made fording/crossing the Bull Run problematic. Additionally, the continual trains of heavy wagons transporting the much-needed food and supplies from Manassas Junction to Centreville had made muddy quagmires all along the red clay Manassas-Centreville Road. Efforts to corduroy the road were ineffective, and by late November Gen. Johnston's Quartermaster, Major Alfred Barbour, realized that continuing to rely on the Manassas-Centreville Road was problematic and that the overworked horse and mule teams hauling the supplies from Manassas Junction were consuming, on a daily basis, as much or more forage as they were transporting. The supply situation was becoming desperate.

Gen. Johnston and Maj. Barbour decided to construct a railroad spur linking the depot at Manassas Junction with Centreville. The spur was intended as a temporary rail line to solve the armies' supply challenges through the winter and would not be needed after the planned withdrawal from Centreville in the coming spring. They estimated it would take two months to construct the spur, the first U.S. railroad in history built exclusively for military use.

(cont on page 8)

CENTREVILLE MILITARY RAIL ROAD TOUR

Surveying and grading of the roadbed began in November and was initially done by soldiers. Blake shared an apt quote from Pvt. William McClellan, 9th Alabama Inf. Regt: *"50,000 men were working on a six-mile railroad in shift of six hours per day, causing them to have no time for working on winter huts."* Gen. Johnston realized that *"these duties are injurious to us by reducing our numbers"* of troops from necessary patrols, drills, and equipment maintenance, so Maj. Barbour hired approximately 330 experienced railroad workers from the Richmond area. Additional manpower was acquired via freedmen and enslaved men hired from local farmers and planters.

Major Barbour needed a Civil Engineer experienced in railroad operations to oversee and manage the project, and he had direct access to such an individual – Captain Thomas R. Sharp, Maj. Barbour's Assistant Quartermaster. Sharp was raised in a railroad family and had managed or assisted in the management of five southern railroads in the eight years prior to the Civil War. He had assisted BG Thomas Jackson in removing "useable" B&O Railroad locomotives, rail cars, rails, switches, and tools from Jackson's famous May 1861 raid on the B&O depot in Martinsburg and oversaw the movement of the B&O equipment and material to Strasburg via the Valley Pike, and then on to Richmond and Staunton via railroad.



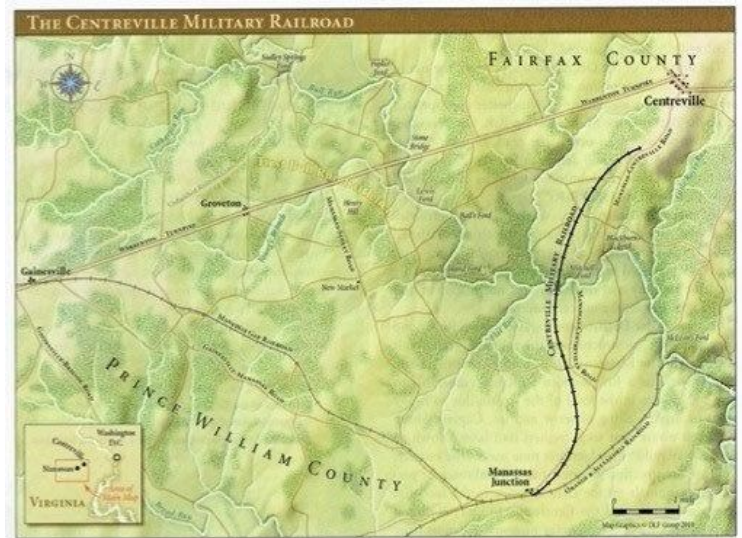
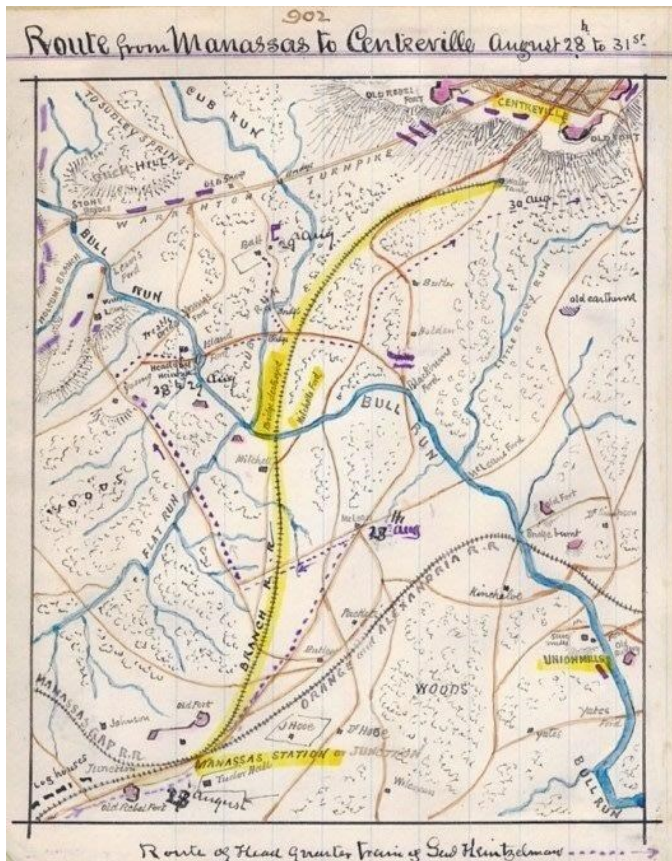
Thomas R. Sharp (LOC)

In December 1861, Maj. Barbour directed Capt. Sharp to complete the railroad spur from Manassas to Centreville. When the O&A Railroad refused Sharp's request to use their rails for the spur, he used the B&O rails, switches and tools that had been captured in Jackson's Martinsburg Depot raid and stored in a Winchester warehouse. The rails and switches were transported to Strasburg by wagon and then to Manassas Junction via the Manassas Gap Railroad. By late December, with the arrival of rails, switches, skilled laborers and Captain Sharp, construction of the spur began in earnest. In keeping with the temporary nature of the railroad spur and the need for speed, railroad crossties were hewn from local trees and installed at roughly twice the standard distance between crossties, and no ballast (typically gravel) for roadbed stability and drainage was used.

Blake next discussed the route of the CMRR, which ran from the O&A Railroad just east of Manassas Junction, paralleling the Manassas – Centreville Road, then sloped downward toward Bull Run where it crossed on a trestle bridge between Mitchell's Ford and Cub Run, ascended the higher ground north of Bull Run (including some rocky terrain that had to be blasted through using black powder), and terminating near Centreville on the farm of James Murtaugh.

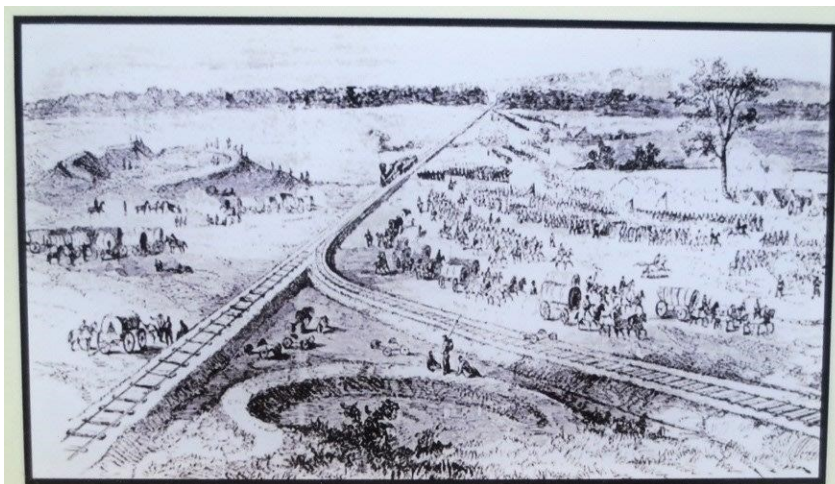
(cont on page 9)

CENTREVILLE MILITARY RAIL ROAD TOUR



1862 Map showing CMRR route & noting the Destroyed Bridge & Terminus Water Tank (left) and Modern Map showing CMRR route (above)

The group then walked to the nearby rail line where, using the sketch below, Blake pointed 'up track' to the location of Manassas Junction (today's Norfolk Southern Depot) and highlighted the 1861 fortifications constructed to protect the CMRR junction with the O&A Railroad.



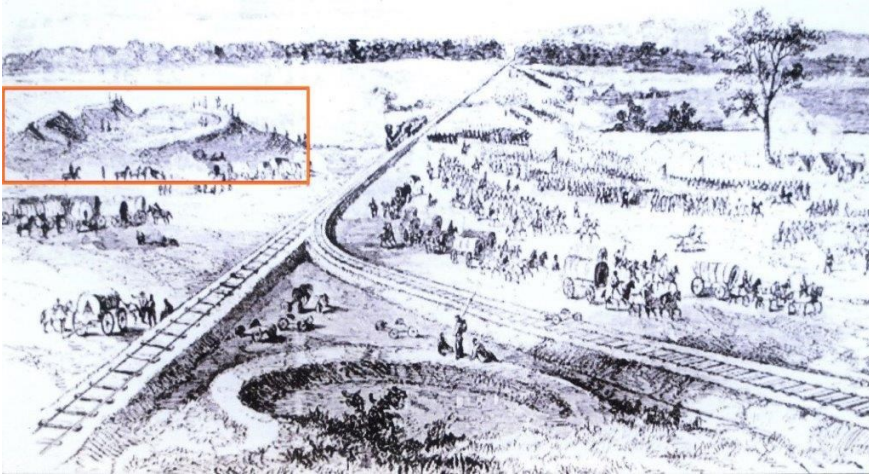
Earthworks guarding the junction of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad and the abandoned Confederate Branch Military Railroad to Centreville
Courtesy Manassas Museum Collection

Illustration showing earthworks guarding the junction of the CMRR with the O&A Railroad (Manassas Museum Collection)

(cont on page 10)

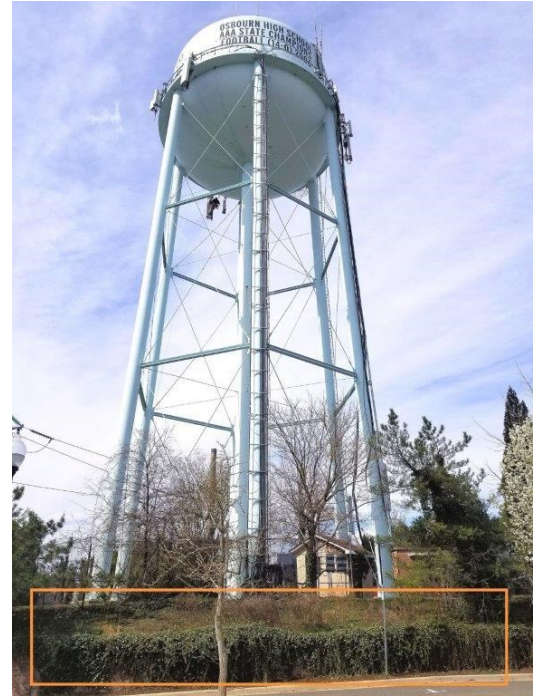
CENTREVILLE MILITARY RAIL ROAD TOUR

Blake then pointed out that the Manassas Water Tower sits on the remnant of the fortification depicted in the upper left of the sketch (new and very surprising information to all) and noting that we were standing at the location where the CMRR spur began. Note the sketch and photo, below, annotated with orange rectangles outlining the fortification and the fortification remnant that the water tower sits on.



(Above) Annotated sketch of earthwork fortification guarding the CMRR junction with the O&A Railroad (Manassas Museum Collection)

(Right) Annotated photo of the Manassas water tower sited on the fortification remnants



Following an engaging discussion and Q&A, the enthusiastic tour group consolidated into nine vehicles for the drive to Stop 2. Our caravan was so large that several quipped we should turn our car lights on to mimic a funeral procession, thereby receiving due deference as we followed the CMRR route through the City of Manassas parallel to the Manassas-Centreville Road (today's Old Centreville/Ordway Road and Rt 28/Centreville Road) heading towards Centreville.

Stop 2 was at Mitchell's Ford, where we visited the site of the CMRR trestle bridge's crossing of Bull Run. This bridge was built under the supervision of railroad engineers hired from Richmond. For expediency purposes, the bridge was built of wood and at the lowest height necessary to cross the stream. Aware of the risk of potential stream level rises, Captain Sharp knew the railroad would most likely be abandoned before the arrival of spring rains and any potential flooding. One of the keys to locating this site is the ravine that runs south to north into Bull Run. Very few people are aware of the significance of this site, and the tour group really appreciated the opportunity to visit it.

(cont on page 11)

CENTREVILLE MILITARY RAIL ROAD TOUR



1862 photograph of CMRR trestle bridge crossing Bull Run (LOC)

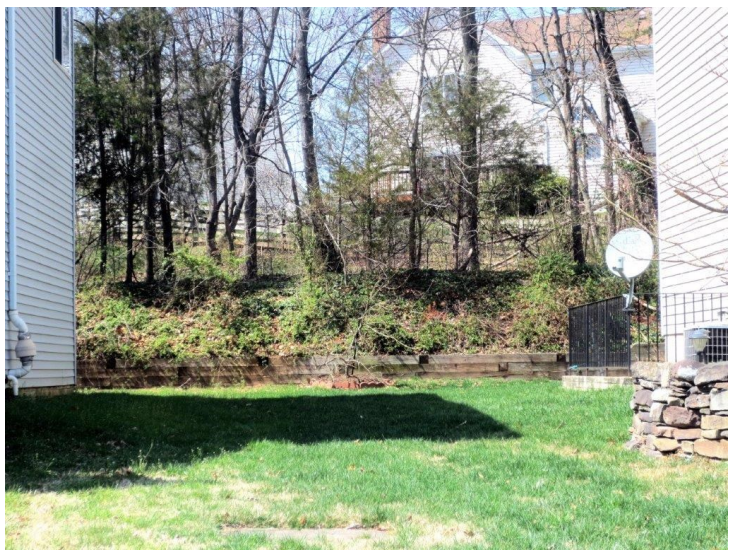


Our tour group at trestle bridge site

The tour group's next stop was the Centreville Confederate Military Railroad Park located on Compton Road, directly opposite the entrance to the Upper Occoquan Service Authority, where a Fairfax County historical marker identifies the beginning of the linear park that extends into the Compton Ridge community along Colonel Taylor Lane. Just behind the historical marker (looking through the bamboo surrounding the marker) one can see a slight trace of the CMRR roadbed remnant, which served as an introduction for what was to come. Significant remnants of the roadbed remain, extending through the back yards of houses on the north side of Colonel Taylor Lane.



Fairfax County Historical Marker
Centreville Confederate Military Railroad



CMRR roadbed remnants behind homes on Colonel Taylor Lane

(cont on page 12)

CENTREVILLE MILITARY RAIL ROAD TOUR

The Park and the roadbed remnants extend beyond the end of Colonel Taylor Lane and into the wooded area behind the homes on the south side of Meeting Camp Road, including a spectacular remnant that extends a good 100 yards. Lewis and Myers Landscaping, LLC had been contracted (for free) to clear a suitable path and defoliate the roadbed for accessibility by the tour group. Once inside the park at the end of Colonel Taylor Lane, Jim oriented the tour group and, while standing on the elevated roadbed, reminded everyone of the labor required to construct the railroad spur.

CMRR roadbed remnants in wooded area
beyond the end of Colonel Taylor Lane



Blake then pointed towards the end of the roadbed remnant and discussed the 2019 discovery of remnants of a CMRR worker campsite.



CMRR Worker Campsite Remnants (Blake Myers)

Near the worker campsite one can view good examples of the rocky terrain in this area that had to be blasted through to construct the CMRR roadbed.

An example of the rocky ground that was blasted through to construct the CMRR roadbed (Blake Myers)



(cont on page 13)

CENTREVILLE MILITARY RAIL ROAD TOUR

And of course, several of our hardcore tour participants had to walk to the very end of the remnant.

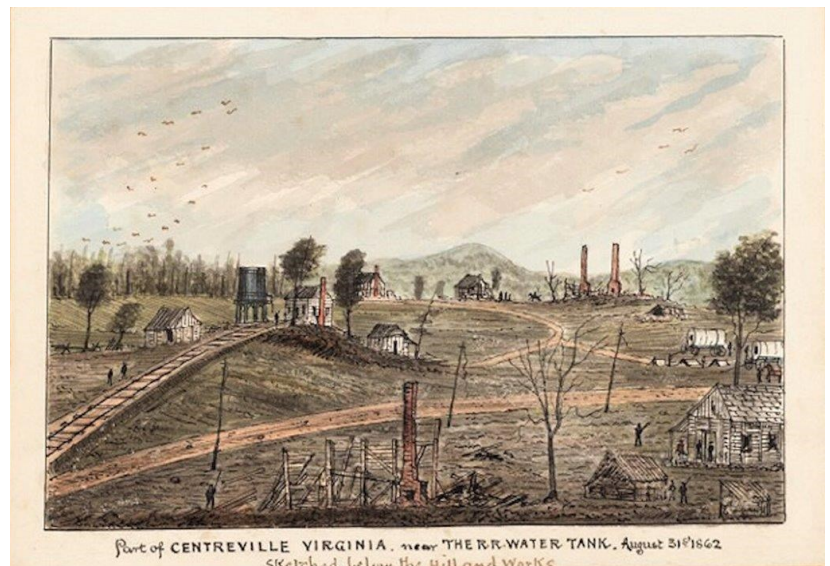
Tour group walking the CMRR roadbed remnant



Our next stop was at the terminus of the CMRR, which is marked by an inscribed bronze plaque on a large rock installed by the Centreville Historic Society in 1996. Blake showed the group a period sketch of what the actual terminus looked like - complete with a water tank which was used to replenish the water supply for the steam engines traveling to and from Manassas. Blake explained that, given the fragile nature of the roadbed and the lack of sidings or turn-around at the terminus, locomotives operating on the CMRR likely operated at slow speed (to avoid damage to the rails and roadbed, and to minimize the likelihood of a derailment), and once unloaded at the terminus, returned to Manassas by traveling in reverse. The process of loading the railcars at Manassas Junction, traveling to Centreville, unloading the rail cars, uploading items and soldiers for the return trip to Manassas, and traveling back to Manassas was not quickly done and likely consumed 1 or 2 days. Once unloaded at the terminus, the supplies, food, and forage were loaded into wagons and hauled to the unit camps in and around Centreville.



CMRR Terminus marker - 7.13.19



CMRR terminus sketch (Robert K. Sneden)

(cont on page 14)

CENTREVILLE MILITARY RAIL ROAD TOUR

With the arrival of Spring, on March 9, 1862, Gen. Johnston ordered the withdrawal of the armies from Centreville to more defensible terrain south of the Rappahannock River. The withdrawal signaled the end of the CMRR, and it now served its final purpose, transporting soldiers, animals, and supplies from Centreville to Manassas Junction. Soldiers who were wounded and/or convalescing continued on via the O&A and Virginia Central railroads to military hospitals in Culpeper and Staunton, respectively. The CMRR was fully operational for a period of approximately five weeks. On March 11, the last departing Confederate soldiers burned or destroyed everything of military value (except the CMRR rails) in Centreville and Manassas, including the trestle bridge across Bull Run, some of the rolling stock and the terminus. By the end of July, all of the CMRR rails had been taken up by Federal forces and returned to the B&O Railroad.

Except for an optional stop after lunch, this concluded the tour of the CMRR, but it did not conclude the entire tour. Blake informed the group that he thought they would appreciate a historical and poignant story, not directly linked to the CMRR, but an event that took place in early December 1861 near the site of the 'soon-to-be' terminus.

Jim then told the story - an event involving two young Confederate privates, Dennis Corcoran and Michael O'Brien, members of Major Roberdeau Wheat's 1st Special Battalion "Louisiana Tigers". Privates Corcoran and O'Brien had gotten liquored up on the night of November 29, 1861, and tried to free a couple of their comrades, who were already in confinement for misbehavior. In doing so, they attacked the guards and the Officer of the Guard while on duty. Given the "increasing significant discipline problems" arising in the Confederate camps, typically in the evening and during hours of darkness, Gen. Johnston determined to use this incident to set an example for the Army. Corcoran and O'Brien were indicted under two charges, both carrying the potential penalty of death.



Jim Lewis tells the CMRR Terminus story of the execution of Privates Corcoran and O'Brien
(Blake Myers)

(cont on page 15)

CENTREVILLE MILITARY RAIL ROAD TOUR

A general court martial was conducted on December 6th, and Major Wheat's attempts to get the charges reduced were not successful. Both men were found guilty of the charges and sentenced to be shot to death, and December 9th was set as the execution day – the first military execution conducted in any Confederate Army. The site selected for the execution was in the area where the CMRR terminus would soon be established. On execution day, a bright, clear and crisp winter morning, some 10,000 to 15,000 soldiers arrived and drew up on three sides of a hollow – on the fourth (open) side two posts were driven into the ground, two graves dug, and two plain wooden coffins lay nearby. Soon, a four-horse covered wagon with six soldiers walking alongside approached, followed by the funeral cortege, a brass band playing "Dead March" from "Saul," and a 24-man firing party from the same company as Privates Corcoran and O'Brien, Company B, 1st Special Battalion.



Major Chatham Roberdeau
Wheat (Library of Congress)

Corcoran and O'Brien, with their hands tied behind their backs, were led backwards, and knelt up against the posts afforded each of them. A Catholic priest comforted them. Ironically, both men displayed a remarkable calmness, as the firing party advanced to within 20 steps, and the priest bid them farewell – never flinching when the command "AIM" rang out, nor when the command "FIRE" was given and drowned out by the crashing volley that followed. Corcoran's brother was in the ranks that day and before the smoke cleared, he ran and held his brother as he expired in his arms. Both bodies were examined, pronounced dead, placed in their coffins, and laid in their graves. Meanwhile, Major Wheat was back in his tent, sobbing.

Corcoran's and O'Brien's graves were all but forgotten after a few years and almost all signs of them obliterated. This story was passed down by a number of Centreville residents over the years and a sign was finally erected in the 1930s "in the vicinity" near the base of an elm tree. Its text read, *"Here was the end of the track of the Confederate Military Rail-road,"* and eventually referenced *"two soldiers of Wheat's 1st Louisiana 'Louisiana Tigers' suffered military execution,"* and *"their bodies are buried near the base of this Elm tree."*



Original Terminus Sign
(Blake Myers)

(cont on page 16)

CENTREVILLE MILITARY RAIL ROAD TOUR

Jim completed the story at Tour Stop 5, the cemetery of St. John's Episcopal Church in Historic Centreville. Upon arrival at the cemetery, Jim continued by saying that in 1978, a NPS historian named Michael R. Thomas visited the execution site and was determined to find the exact location of the graves and raise a marker over them. He found the old sign, but the elm tree no longer existed and his hopes faded. However, several months later Michael met a long-time Centreville resident, who said he remembered the old elm stump and took him to the location where he thought the graves were located. They decided not to mark the graves' locations.

Later, learning the area was scheduled for development, Thomas gained permission to seek a court order for exhumation of the soldiers' remains. Almost a year later, the court order was acquired, and the archaeological exploration and exhumation was completed. Artifacts found in the graves included porcelain shirt buttons, bullets, coffin nails, a crucifix with a piece of cloth, cloth fabric from both soldiers' shirts and coats, and the soldiers' belt buckles. All items were photographed and catalogued by the Library of Congress and ultimately reposed in the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond.

With everything completed by the summer of 1979, it was decided to reinter the remains of Dennis Corcoran and Michael O'Brien in marked graves. Reverend William Peterson, an avid student of history and the Rector of St. John's Episcopal Church, took an immediate interest in the project and arranged to have the remains reinterred in this cemetery in a marked grave on December 9, 1979 – exactly 118 years from the day of their executions. And here they rest in peace, together again. Many in the tour group commented that this was the perfect ending for a wonderful tour.



Cemetery, St. John's Episcopal Church (Historic Centreville) Private Corcoran's and Private O'Brien's gravestone
(Blake Myers)

This brought the morning's portion of the tour to conclusion. Those who had opted to return to the Manassas Visitor Center disembarked. The rest, fifteen hardy souls who opted to take the afternoon trek to a roadbed remnant in Bull Run Regional Park, headed to the local Burger King for lunch and a bit more fellowship.

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CENTREVILLE MILITARY RAIL ROAD TOUR

Upon arrival at Bull Run Regional Park, it was noted that Lewis and Myers Landscaping, LLC had also cleared the path to this roadbed remnant. However, it must be noted that this area was a bit more problematic, having to cross perpetually muddy areas under which lies a spring and underground stream. In any event, it took approximately 20 minutes to hike to the roadbed and, as advertised, it was spectacular. The group spent some time chatting about the logistics of the roadbed and decided to walk the entire remnant. To prove that these brave souls had braved this swamp-riddled area, the last group photo was taken on the roadbed remnant.



CMRR roadbed remnant in BR Regional Park



Group photo on CMRR roadbed remnant in BR Regional Park
(Eric Fowler)

As we drove back to the Manassas Visitor Center, we reminisced about the day, and all expressed complete satisfaction. Afterwards, Blake and Jim decided to have a celebratory beer at a local bar just across the railroad tracks and agreed on the following: the weather was magnificent, the tour group was enthusiastic and attentive with many pertinent questions, and our plans to target this tour for a time before the seasonal foliage sprouted was wise.

The tour also turned out to be very rewarding personally, as it had been delayed twice in 2020 and 2022 due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, and a third time due to an 'early' St. Patrick's Day parade in Manassas. All in all, we couldn't have envisioned a better tour experience. Thanks to all tour participants for their active participation, as that made the day all the more enjoyable.



PRESERVATION CORNER

By Blake Myers

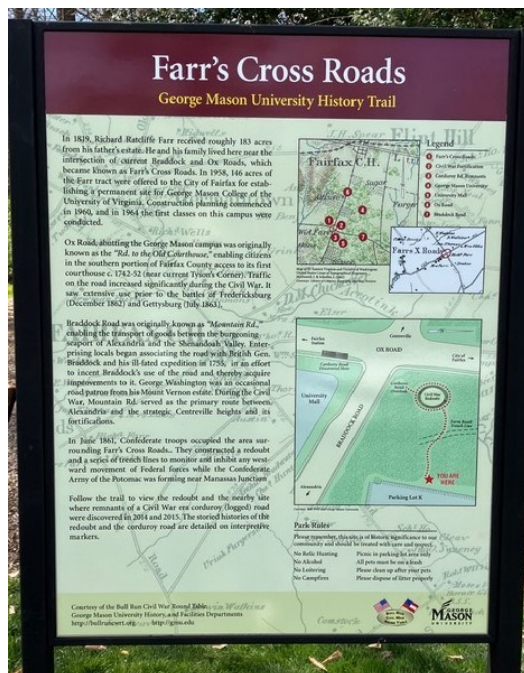
Photos by Blake Myers unless
otherwise noted



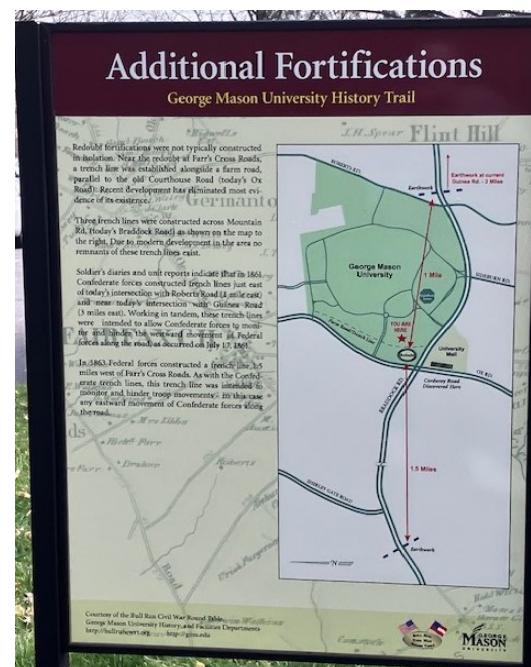
Access Trail Entrance, Farr's Cross Roads Historic Site

Greetings BRCWRT Members and Friends - This edition of *Preservation Corner* provides information on recent updates to the preservation and interpretation of Farr's Cross Roads Historic Site, located on George Mason University's Fairfax Campus, and the Historic Site tour/class conducted on March 20, 2024, for George Mason University (GMU) students enrolled in the University's Civil War and Reconstruction (Hist 373) course.

During the past year, BRCWRT and GMU have enhanced the Farr's Cross Roads Historic Site by adding a Corduroy Road overlook and interpretive marker, and updating the Access Trail and Redoubt interpretive markers. The new Corduroy Road overlook, adjacent to the Redoubt and overlooking "Farr's Cross Roads" and the site of the 2014 and 2015 corduroy road discoveries, was established and cleared by GMU's Grounds Department in March 2023. Through 2023 BRCWRT's Blake Myers and Jim Lewis worked with GMU's Graphic Designer John Forgy to design and develop an



Access Trail Interpretive Marker (front panel)



Access Trail Interpretive Marker (back panel)

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PRESERVATION CORNER

interpretive marker for the Corduroy Road overlook, and to revise and update the interpretive markers at the Access Trail entrance and at the Redoubt. The interpretive marker panels were completed in January 2024 and installed during the 1st week of March.

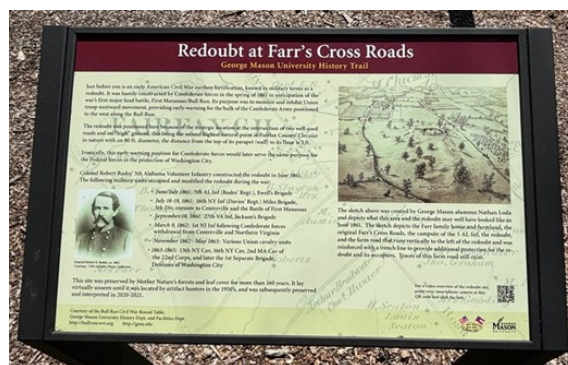
The Access Trail interpretive marker has been updated to reflect the Corduroy Road Overlook on the site map (front panel) and to depict an earthwork constructed by Federal forces in 1863 approximately 1.5 miles west of Farr's Cross Roads along New Braddock Road (back panel). Until early 2024 a 50-ft remnant of that earthwork remained but has since been obliterated by ground clearance for a development project.

The Redoubt interpretive marker has been updated to include the Redoubt at Farr's Cross Roads sketch created by GMU alumnus Nathan Loda, depicting what the Redoubt and the area surrounding Farr's Cross Roads may well have looked like in June of 1861. The QR code on the marker provides a link to the *Redoubt at Farr's Cross Roads* video – a video created by BRCWRT and the Green Machine, and directed and produced by Green Machine media director Joshua Cruse.

The newly installed Corduroy Road interpretive marker highlights the history of 'road corduroying' and of the corduroy road constructed in 1862 on the *Road to the Courthouse* from Fairfax Court House to Fairfax Station and on to Wolf Run Shoals. It also includes information on the discoveries of sections of the corduroy road logs in 2014 and 2015, and of the dendrochronology assessment of the 2014 logs done in 2016. The QR code on the marker provides a link to a short slide show and photographs of the dendrochronology assessment.



The Redoubt at Farr's Cross Roads



Redoubt at Farr's Cross Roads Interpretive Marker



Corduroy Road Overlook



Corduroy Road Interpretive Marker

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PRESERVATION CORNER

BRCWRT Tour/Class for GMU Students, Faculty Members and Staff

On March 20, 2024, BRCWRT members Brian McEnany, Jim Lewis and Blake Myers conducted a Farr's Cross Roads Historic Site tour/class in support of GMU's Civil War and Reconstruction (Hist 373) course. This tour/class continued an annual event that began in November 2016 but had been paused since 2020 due to the Coronavirus Pandemic and the move to remote class attendance during the pandemic. The return to in-person classes in 2023-24 afforded the opportunity to re-start this annual on-site tour/class. Dr. Brian Platt and Professor Christopher Hamner concurred, actively supporting and promoting the tour/class. Our March 20 tour group included fourteen HIST 373 students, Dr. Platt, Professor Hamner and a member of the University's Development Department, for a total of seventeen participants.

The tour began at the Access Trail Entrance (Parking Lot K) with Blake providing an overview of the history of the preservation and interpretation of Farr's Cross Roads Historic Site. Blake's overview highlighted the growth of advocacy within GMU to preserve and interpret the site, and the strong partnership between BRCWRT and GMU that accomplished the site's preservation and interpretation – a project that continues to evolve as we learn more about the history of Farr's Cross Roads and the surrounding area. Jim and Brian then provided an overview of the site's history. Jim discussed the beginnings of Braddock and Ox Roads, the site's affiliation with the Farr family and the origin of *Farr's Cross Roads*, and the establishment of *George Mason College of the University of Virginia*. Brian then discussed the site's Civil War history, including the general characteristics of a redoubt, why this redoubt was constructed here, its con-

struction in early June 1861 by the 5th Alabama Infantry Regiment commanded by Col Robert Rodes, its use by Confederate forces during the weeks leading up to the Battle of 1st Manassas/Bull Run on July 21, 1861, and the use of the redoubt throughout the war by both Confederate and Federal forces.



GMU's Professor Christopher Hamner and Dr. Brian Platt with BRCWRT's Blake Myers, Brian McEnany and Jim Lewis - A Proven and Productive Team (photo courtesy of Sam Laudenslager)

The tour proceeded to the Redoubt, where Brian discussed the construction and use of Civil War redoubts, the significance of the Redoubt at Farr's Crossroads and its location, and the various units known to have occupied and used the redoubt. Brian also discussed the history of how this redoubt was located and documented, leading to its eventual preservation and interpretation and to *The Redoubt at Farr's Cross Roads* video (accessible via the marker's QR code) produced by the Green Machine Media Department.

We next moved to the recently established Corduroy Road Overlook where Jim discussed the history of corduroy roads in general and of this specific corduroy road, constructed during the Civil War between Fairfax Courthouse and

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Blake Myers Presenting the Site's Preservation and Interpretation History
(photo courtesy of Sam Laudenslager)



Jim Lewis & Brian McEnany Presenting the History of Farr's Cross Roads and its Surrounding Area, and the Site's Civil War History

Fairfax Station and subsequently to Wolf Run Shoals on the Occoquan River. Jim also discussed the corduroy road discoveries along Ox Road near University Mall in March 2014 and October 2015, and what occurred as a result of each discovery, from indiscriminately piling the corduroy road logs next to the University Mall sign in 2014 to recording, tagging, and replacing each log in 2015.



Brian McEnany & the Tour Group at The Redoubt at Farr's Cross Roads (photo on right courtesy of Sam Laudenslager)



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PRESERVATION CORNER



Jim Lewis & the Tour Group at the Corduroy Road Overlook (photo on right courtesy of Sam Laudenslager)

We concluded the tour with a Group Photograph in front of the redoubt, followed by Blake's closing remarks - thanking Dr. Platt, Professor Hamner and the attendees for their time and attendance, requesting they spread the word about this site and its history, and stressing the importance of history education and historical preservation not only for current generations, but for generations that will follow.

A people without knowledge of their history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots.

Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it (Winston Churchill, 1914)

When asked by a reporter in 1997 why he cared so much about battlefield preservation, noted CW re-enactor and preservationist Brian Pohanka answered, "Some kid a hundred years from now is going to gain an appreciation for the Civil War and want to see these places. He's going to go down there and be standing in a parking lot. I'm fighting for that kid."



The Tour Group – A Terrific Group and Day for Our Tour (photo courtesy of Sam Laudenslager)

Thank you for your continued interest in, and support of, Civil War historic preservation in general and in BRCWRT's preservation projects, actions, and activities.

Blake Myers, BRCWRT Preservation Chair

Battle of Spotsylvania tour

Saturday June 22

The tour is free



Tour highlights: Beginning of the battle, Upton's attack, and walking approximately two hours in the Bloody Angle.

Tour guide: Greg Mertz, retired interpreter at the battlefield

Assembly time and location: 9:30 AM at Spotsylvania Courthouse (in front of the Richard Holbert Memorial Building, 9104 Courthouse Road, Spotsylvania). We will finish about 3 PM.

Mode of transportation: Carpool caravan leaving from Spotsylvania Courthouse (individuals may want to arrange carpools with friends prior to leaving northern Virginia).

Lunch break at Subway or a Mexican restaurant.

Sign up on the website or at a meeting.

BRCWRT Contact: John Scully at scullycivilwar@gmail.com or text to 703-869-4036

IMAGE OF THE MONTH

By Melissa A. Winn

'Play Ball!': The Iron Brigade Commander and Milwaukee Baseball

On November 20, 1859, Milwaukee, Wisconsin's first ever game of base ball (as it was spelled in the early years) was played by two teams of seven at the Milwaukee Fair Ground. The game was organized by Rufus King, then-publisher of the "Milwaukee Sentinel" and later a general in the Union Army. King helped raise the famous Iron Brigade, which was originally called King's Wisconsin Brigade and consisted of the 2nd, 6th, and 7th Wisconsin regiments and the 19th Indiana Infantry regiment. King commanded it from September 28, 1861, to May 7, 1862. (The 24th Michigan Infantry joined the brigade on October 8, 1862.) King and his comrades in Milwaukee played three organized games of baseball in 1859. In 1860 they organized the Milwaukee Baseball Club, but the outbreak of the Civil War drew many of the players away to fight in the Union Army. After the war's end, Milwaukee citizens organized the Cream City Baseball Club, an amateur club, which played and practiced downtown on the former Civil War soldier training ground, Camp Scott.

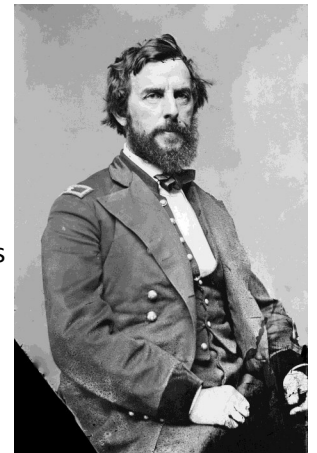
Milwaukee Cream City Baseball Club was a successful club from 1865-1870, winning the state amateur championship three times. Milwaukee's first professional baseball club was also called the Cream Citys, joining the National League in 1878.

Rufus King was only 19 when he graduated fourth in his class at West Point in 1833. He served several years in the U.S. Corps of Engineers before resigning to work for the New York and Erie Railroad and then as a newspaperman. In September 1845, King moved to Milwaukee to assume editorship of the "Sentinel and Gazette." King helped form the new state of Wisconsin's constitution, advocated free libraries in the city, and worked to improve the city's schools throughout the 1840s and 1850s. He became the first school board president in 1846 and the first superintendent of Milwaukee schools when the position was formalized in 1859. He was appointed a brigadier general of the Wisconsin militia on April 15, 1861, and of U.S. Volunteers on May 17. On March 13, 1862, he was promoted to command of a division, which included the Iron Brigade. At the Second Battle of Bull Run, King suffered epileptic seizures and had to turn over command of the division. His epileptic seizures became more frequent, and in October 1863, King resigned his commission, and was appointed Minister to the Papal States. In 1868 he returned to New York and soon retired on account of failing health. He died in New York City in 1876.



Photo: TN Graphics

Photo: Library of Congress



AARON BURTON

The Merging Worlds of Body Servants and Soldiers

By John Carter

In the study of both the Civil War and slavery, it is easy for individuals and families to disappear from view. Their life stories are often replaced by broad generalizations of who they were as a people. Their stories, however, were not as simple as black and white, north and south, free and slave. Many factors, internal and external, shaped their individual lives and made them who they were. Personal relationships and the roles of individuals within the household were later brought to the battlefield. The relationship of slaves to the plantation owners and their families is well documented, and the condition of their bondage is understood. What is not generally recognized are the individual family ties which existed within many of those households.

Historians, and people in general, look unfavorably on the home-spun southern tales of the faithful slave and the Black mammy. They are seen as an apologia for slavery, which was mostly brutal and degrading, and the institution cannot be defended. That is shown by the countless examples of runaway slaves, and those who were waiting for the first opportunity to flee their bondage. What gets lost, however, are where bonds of affection had developed between family members and their slaves. The war highlighted these issues, especially in the case of the Confederate body servant who served during the war. The worlds of the Black body servant and the white southern soldier would merge in 1861 when they came together in camps like the one in Centreville. Two individuals who came to Northern Virginia illustrate this connection: Aaron Burton and John Singleton Mosby.

Aaron Burton was born into slavery on a plantation in Albemarle County, Virginia, in May of 1814 to Aaron and Polly Burton. He and his parents lived in the Albert D. Mosby household. Albert was the father of Col. John Singleton Mosby, "the Gray Ghost." Legend and fact are mixed about Aaron's birth and early years. Legend says he was part Indian, and historians believe he had been a wedding gift to Mosby's mother, Virginia, from her father, James McLaurine, of Powhatan, Virginia. The Albert Mosby household, according to the 1850 Federal slave census for Albemarle County, included twenty-one slaves. By the 1860 Census, fewer slaves were shown in the household, and Aaron's name was not listed. His education and occupational skills are uncertain. He was, however, listed as illiterate in the 1900



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census of Brooklyn, New York. Supposedly he was skilled in carriage-making, and papers in the Southern Historical Collection at Chapel Hill, North Carolina indicate he was a coachman for Mosby's father.

Family lore and post-war interviews show that he was a cherished member of the Mosby household. He claimed to have "raised Colonel Mosby," whom he considered to be a bright boy, and to whom he had become attached. A family legend tells of Mosby bringing a colored playmate to school one day, and then watching as the other children "auctioned him off." Being fifteen years older than Mosby, Aaron was probably not the playmate Mosby had supposedly brought with him.*1 The story is also unlikely because Mosby had been turned against slavery by an early tutor.

Aaron said he was specifically asked by Colonel Mosby to accompany him to the war. Many southern officers took their most trusted personal slaves to the war with them to act as their body servants. By 1860, Mosby and his wife, Pauline, were living in Bristol, Virginia, and Aaron apparently was living with them, as tax records show that they had one slave. During this time, Mosby had joined a militia company of cavalry in Abingdon, Virginia, led by Col. William "Grumble" Jones. With the fall of Fort Sumter in April, 1861, his company, the Washington Mounted Rifles, was called up, and Mosby took Aaron with him. Jones and Mosby would shortly join J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry in Hanover, Virginia.

As a body servant to a Confederate officer, Aaron's function would be to relieve Mosby of the more mundane camp duties performed by enlisted men. He would provide a variety of services, which Civil War historian Bell Irvin Wiley described:

The visitor to the southern camps in the first year of the war might expect always

to encounter large numbers of Negroes. These, to be sure, were not soldiers, but their relation to the fighting force was so vital and so intimate as to merit consideration as part of the army. Conspicuous among the Negroes attached to military personnel were the body servants. When members of slaveholding families enlisted in 1861, it was quite common for them to take along black members of the household to serve them in camp... non-slaveholders sometimes hired Negroes to act as body servants... the life of a body servant was generally not a hard one. He seldom lacked food, and he usually recouped his wardrobe in the wake of each battle from Yankee sources. He had opportunities to earn money by doing odd jobs for his master's comrades... in camp his ready laugh was a valuable stimulus to soldier morale, as was his proficiency with song and guitar.*2

It must have seemed odd and unsettling for the white soldiers to see Black workers and body servants marching with the army. For Aaron Burton, the military structure he encountered in camp was very similar to the way he had always lived, and he probably found it amusing to see white soldiers taking orders and performing tasks similar to what he performed back home. Like other Black servants, he would not be put into the fights. This was demonstrated by the resistance of the Confederate Government to use them in battle, even at the end of the war when the situation had become very desperate. If they fought alongside white soldiers, they would not only be free, they could also be considered equal.

This social and military structure began in the 1660s, when Virginia enacted legislation which defined the status of slaves, indentured servants, women, and

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Indians. Along with the legal codification of slavery, it defined work roles, dependency, and personal identity. It also codified the patriarchal power of the male head of the household. As one historian has stated, "English racial attitudes of the early seventeenth century are best described as an increasingly coherent construction of racial difference to communicate desires for domination."³ The young southern soldier would experience a similar form of domination during the war.

The code related not only to the planter's family and his enslaved servants, but to everyone in society. There were certain roles, duties, and forms of labor which should only be performed by the lower classes. Elite white women, for example, would not be allowed to perform common labor, especially outside of the house. While focusing heavily on gender, historian Kathleen M. Brown shows how it applies to the other social categories that were used to define slavery:

I have conceptualized race, class, and gender as overlapping and related social categories... By gender, I mean the historically specific discourses, social roles and identities defining sexual difference and frequently deployed for the purposes of social and political order. Race is similarly constituted by the social meanings attached to physical appearance - itself a highly mediated phenomenon contingent upon culture - and used in the service of economic and imperial goals. Class includes the power deriving from material inequalities, the systemic maintenance of those inequalities by dominant social groups, and the symbols of that power commonly recognized by a society. Patriarchy... [is] historically the specific authority of the father over labor and property... and his right to punish family members and laborers.⁴

The Southern Civil War soldier was directly impacted by this concept, with officers filling the role of the family patriarch. Whether from slave-holding families or non-slave-holding families, many of these young men had not been used to taking orders or performing menial tasks. As it had been since colonial times, this had been the role of a servant, a slave, or a work hand, and it was the most difficult thing they had to learn to accept. Historian Reid Mitchell described how their military experience affected them:

Most men who were soldiers for any period of time underwent a psychological transformation... as they became isolated from their old patterns of life, men had to make themselves a new identity from the very military life that threatened to degrade them... Men had valued their autonomy so much that they went to war when they felt it was threatened. Military life itself, however, proved a powerful threat to men's self-esteem. Military discipline required that their autonomy be curtailed... Americans found military regimentation hard to accept... the soldier of the 1860s was most likely an independent farmer or a farmer's son... the authority immediately over him was personal... the patriarchal rule of a father or older brother... The rules and restrictions of the army reminded the Confederate of the humiliation of slavery and of the degraded position that blacks held in society. Southerners of all classes referred to military discipline as a form of slavery. The volunteers feared what might best be called dehumanization.⁵

As young men transformed into adults and soldiers, they were faced with an unpleasant reality. In the camps they followed officers' orders, cooked and cleaned, and if in the cavalry, they took care of their own horses. They were sent

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on errands, put to work in the construction of fortifications and winter cabins, and were at the beck and call of most any officer. They only had to look around at the Black servants in camp to realize they were performing many of the same duties. According to Bell Irvin Wiley, "the duties of these Negroes consisted mainly of cooking, washing, and of cleaning quarters. Those attached to the cavalry companies were required to look after their master's horses..."*6

The Blacks who were not body servants served as teamsters on the wagon trains, built fortifications, and worked on railroads and roadways. When camp broke and the Army was moving, the body servants and Black workers would march in the rear of the army behind the supply wagons. They were unarmed, and they were kept out of range of the enemy, even when in camp. Bell Irvin Wiley noted that:

During battles, the body servant usually remained in the rear out of reach of Federal shells. But a few became so thoroughly imbued with the martial spirit as to grab up muskets during the battle and take pot shots at the enemy... when fighting abated, the colored aide usually loaded himself with canteens and haversacks and went in search of his master. If the later was wounded, the servant carried him to shelter and sought medical assistance; if he was killed, the domestic made arrangements for his burial or escorted the body home.*7

Mosby confirms this when he said in one of his letters, "I left Aaron back out of danger of their shell, but after a while the Yankees advanced their battery and threw a shell which passed entirely through a house in which Aaron was standing. He was awfully scared and scampered off."*8 Later he wrote that,

"Aaron thinks himself quite a hero now though he does not want to come again in such disagreeable proximity to a bomb-shell."*9 There is no mention in Mosby's letters or writings that Aaron actually picked up a gun and fought, nor that he went out with the Rangers on raids.

Mosby infrequently mentioned Aaron in his letters, and when he did, he usually focused on the duties he was performing. "Aaron is going to wait on me which will be a great assistance as I cook, curry my horse, etc; Aaron just came home with his cart loaded down with vegetables, etc. we get from their gardens [Yankee settlement] ... Aaron is sitting by me shelling out butter beans. Aaron relieves me of all the drudgery of camp - is a very good cook. I write this sitting outdoors by a log fire. Aaron is cooking breakfast." Aaron was often sent out to pick up food, deliver books, take horses to and from Mosby, deliver clothing, and tend to Mosby's belongings.*10

The measure of a man can be taken both by what he does, and what he does not do in times of crisis. There was another duty Aaron performed which was more significant. He must have often been near Mosby, since he was called upon at least three times during the war to carry a badly wounded Mosby to safety. While Mosby doesn't mention it in his writings, his personal treatment and care of Mosby may have been what kept him alive.

There were three occasions where Mosby was badly wounded: once when he was shot in the side; another when he was shot in his left groin; and toward the end of the war when he was shot in the abdomen. Death from shock or an infected wound killed more men during the war than the bullets. In each case, he was moved from location to location before

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being sent to his father's home outside of Lynchburg, Virginia. While Mosby's battalion physician, Dr. William Logan Dunn, may have initially dressed the wounds, Aaron took care of him while in transit.

What he did not do was to run away from Mosby and the Rangers. As often as Aaron Burton was left alone, or sent away on errands, he would have had ample opportunity for escape. He could have simply walked away from camp into the Union lines, especially when the Rangers were close to the Potomac River. It would have also been easy for him to inform Union forces as to the location of Mosby and his men. His actions during the war indicated his continued devotion and affection for Mosby.

Affection was also demonstrated by some plantation owners toward their slaves. Thomas Joyce McClellan owned a 900-acre plantation with a dozen enslaved workers. It was small, compared with the large plantations of Limestone County, Alabama, with several thousand acres and 50-100 enslaved workers. The McClellan family letters written during the war clearly show the affection between their enslaved workers and the family members, and their tokens of affection and remembrance to the McClellan soldiers in the field are frequent. In 1866 a special census was taken in Limestone County to count for the first time the freed enslaved workers as citizens. In that census, and later in the 1870 Limestone County Census, it showed that all of the former enslaved workers had remained on the McClellan farm and worked as sharecroppers (without crop liens) for as long as the McClellans owned the farm.*11

Robert Anderson McClellan was a captain in the 9th Alabama Cavalry and a son of Thomas Joyce McClellan. He wrote

a memorandum in 1865, entitled "The Black Mammy." In it he states:

There was an indiscernible kind ardor and almost simple affection which prompted full confidence in our daily contact with our servants... No memory is dearer to southron hearts than that of the faithful servants... The black mammy, with her turbaned bandanna and her kerchief crossed above her generous bosom, her white apron, her single raised arm absolute... her Kingdom was the center kitchen yard, and all the children black and white her willing subjects - she was my mother's faithful ally and co-author in any branch of industry and economy... I well remember the great tears that ran down her black berry face as she stands by my mother and bids good bye and God's peace to three stalwart sons - one to Lee, one to Albert Sydney Johnson, and one to Wheeler's Cavalry. She had nursed them in infancy, had cried for them in their suffering complaining boyhood, and now stood in her grief and sadness, second only to their own mother."*12

When Northern Alabama was occupied by Union troops, she and the other servants stood by the family when Union troops came searching the farm for the three sons serving in the army, and at the same time carrying off whatever items they could from the farm. At the point of a gun, the enslaved workers refused to give up the sons' location, even when the servants were tending to them in the woods near the house as they recuperated from wounds. The affection that the McClellan family had for their former enslaved workers was similar to what Mosby had for Aaron Burton.

After serving with Mosby for four years, when the war ended Aaron was free. On April 21, 1865 in Salem, Virginia [today's Marshall] Mosby sat on his horse

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in front of nearly 200 of his men and read his farewell message to them. Neither Mosby, nor his biographer, Virgil Carrington Jones, mentioned the presence of Aaron Burton at the farewell. The war was over, but Mosby was still a man wanted by the Union army, so he was always on the move as he waited to get a parole. Records show that Aaron had his own family, which he had left behind when he joined Mosby and his Rangers. Mosby's father may have moved Aaron's family in with him, when he moved his own family from Charlottesville to Ivor Station in Amherst County, Virginia, at the start of the war. Aaron may have gone back to the Mosby home. It was ironic that Aaron was now free, while Mosby was still a man on the run.

Little is known of what Aaron's life was like over the next twenty years. Mosby stayed in touch with him, however, and he would help him find work, and sent him money when it was needed. Late in his life, Aaron told a reporter that when the war ended, Mosby had told him he was free, and to go anywhere he pleased.*13 Somewhere in the fields between Fauquier County and Amherst County, Aaron Burton took his leave of Mosby to start his own life.

From his obituary, it appears that Aaron continued to live in Virginia until he moved to New York. Aaron himself mentioned that he "took his family and left the Mosby farm... living in towns and cities across Virginia."*14 According to the 1870 U.S. Federal Census for St. Anne's Parish in Albemarle County, Virginia, Aaron and his wife, Mary A., lived there in an African American community. He was listed as a farmhand, and she as keeping house. They had five children: Polly, age 22; Rose, 20; Aaron Jr., 10; Frank, age 10; and Mary A., age 8.*15

Aaron came to Brooklyn, New York around 1895 to live with three of his daughters, rotating his residence among them, including his daughter, Hester, and her husband, William H. Douglas. Aaron Burton died on December 20, 1902 of chronic diarrhea at the age of 89. Funeral services were held at the home of his daughter, Rosa Hamilton, and were conducted by the Rev. William T. Dixon, pastor of the Concord Baptist Church of Christ, of which Aaron was a member. He is buried in an unmarked grave in the Cedar Vale section of Evergreen Cemetery in Brooklyn. His daughter, Rosa, was buried alongside him in 1911.*16 The December 22, 1902 *Richmond Times* obituary noted:

The colonel [Mosby] had the greatest confidence in his body servant, and he was frequently left in charge of all booty that was captured from the Union soldiers, while the cavalry raiders went out on other expeditions. The high estimate in which he was held by Mosby was the same as those of recent times who knew Burton. He was a familiar character in the vicinity of Princeton and Willoughby streets [Brooklyn] and was to be found on all sunshiny days seated upon the stoop of the house in which he lived. He was the perfection of politeness, and if even a child said, "Good morning, Father Burton," this old fellow would lift his hat. Mosby did not forget Aaron in his old days, and frequently sent him checks for substantial sums of money to keep him housed.

Aaron Burton had been an enslaved worker in 1860, but in 1865 he was a free man, independent from his former master, John S. Mosby. Mosby would return to his legal career, and to his pre-war Union beliefs and loyalty. He favored the full restoration of Virginia and the South to their former place in the Union. On the other hand, he was not apologetic about the

(cont on page 31)

AARON BURTON

slave-owning South or his own slaveholding. In a 1907 letter to former Ranger Samuel Chapman, Mosby related:

Now while I think as badly of slavery as Horace Greeley did, I am not ashamed that my family were slaveholders. It was our inheritance. Neither am I ashamed that my ancestors were pirates & cattle thieves. People must be judged by the standard of their own age. If it was right to own slaves as property, it was right to fight for it. The South went to war on account of slavery... a soldier fights for his country, right or wrong - he is not responsible for the political merits of the course he fights in. The South was my country.*¹⁷

Mosby's relationship with Ulysses S. Grant after the war greatly altered the course of his life. He was perceived by some as going over to the other side, in his support of Grant, and in his failure to support the Lost Cause. While his country was once again the United States, he did not turn away from Virginia or the South. As a former Whig, he saw the South could be rebuilt by bringing in industry and with internal improvements, but he would go even further in his view of the future of the South. Mosby contributed an article for *Leslie's Weekly Magazine* of April 6, 1901, where he stated:

The real South is just at its birth. The growth of this child of the nation may be gradual, but in the end the South will be far richer and more powerful than the North. In the days to come the South will become the dominant section of the country... without the war of secession the South could never have hoped to attain the future that is now certain. Slavery was a great incubus, paralyzing natural energy. By abolishing this wrong, our war benefited every State south of the Mason-Dixon line. The negroes are producing

more as freemen than they ever did as slaves; and, while there are a great many of the old slave owning families that were reduced to poverty, the great mass of the people are vastly better off today than they were under the old ante-bellum system.

How much better off were former enslaved workers in 1901? How much better off was Aaron Burton? Mosby does not mention either, even though he had stayed in touch with Aaron over the years. It would appear that Aaron had done well enough to marry, raise a family, and survive to old age in Brooklyn, New York. Aaron Burton probably shared one final thing with many of the white Mosby Ranger veterans: he lived well enough after the war, staying out of the newspapers and the history books, and only showing up later in a local obituary as a beloved figure.

1. *Mosby Scrapbook*.

2. Bell Irwin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb*, (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Publishers), 1943.

3. Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, The Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 1996, 4-5.

4. Brown.

5. Reid Mitchell. *Civil War Soldiers*, (Viking Press: New York), 1988, 56-59.

6. Wiley.

7. Wiley, 328.

8. Wiley, 27, Mosby letter November 15, 1862 from Culpeper, letter to Pauline.

9. Wiley, 28, December 9, 1862 Manassas, letter to Pauline.

10. Adele H. Mitchell, *The Letters of John S. Mosby*, Stuart-Mosby Society, 1986.

11. Thomas Joyce letters and papers, Carter family, UNC-Chapel Hill

12. Robert A. McClellan letters, Duke University

13. Paul Ashdown and Edwards Carnell, *The Mosby Myth - A Confederate Hero in Life and Legend*, (Wilmington: SR Books), 2002, 18.

14. Jones, *Ranger Mosby*, 29.

15. Gregory P. Wilson, *Private John S. Mosby, First Virginia Cavalry*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2015, 22-23

16. Wilson, 22-23.

17. Mosby letter.

FIGHTING TOM SWEENEY

By Don Richardson

In his President's Column in February, Kim Brace recounted his exciting find of a letter from Mary Lincoln in a box marked "miscellaneous" at the Huntington Library in Los Angeles, a letter that staff there did not even know that they had. Tucked behind the letter was an envelope that had been franked by "A. Lincoln", but it was not related to the Mary Lincoln letter. When I did a bit of investigating, I found myself with another story.

The envelope was addressed to "Maj. Gen. Fremont" and had the notation in the lower corner "Introducing Col. T. W. Sweeney". John C. Fremont, the "Pathfinder of the West" and the first Republican candidate for President, had returned from Europe to Washington DC at the outbreak of the Civil War, where he was appointed as a Major General by Abraham Lincoln and assigned to command the Department of the West. Sweeney, as it happened, was the officer commanding the Federal arsenal at St. Louis in early 1861. It is not known when Lincoln sent this note to Fremont, but it must have been before November, when Lincoln relieved Fremont of command of the department for insubordination. September seems most likely, since Sweeney was appointed Colonel of the 52nd Illinois infantry on September 1st.

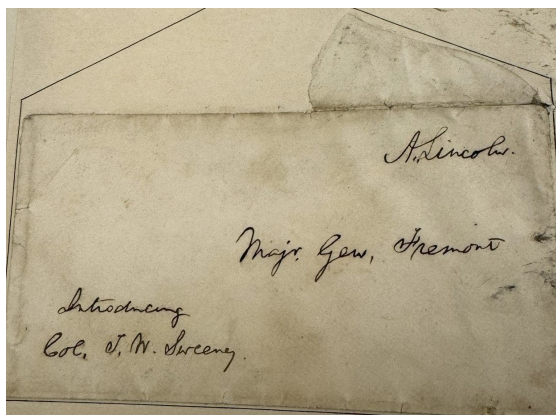


Photo courtesy of Kim Brace

What can be asserted safely is that Sweeney was the poster child for the clichés "Fighting Irish" and "Luck of the Irish". He would fully earn the nickname Fightin' Tom – and he was extremely lucky to survive into old age.

According to Irish blogger Pauline Murphy (*West Cork People*), Thomas William Sweeney was born in Dunmanway, a small town in the southwest corner of Ireland (west of Cork), on Christmas Day in 1820 to Honora and William Sweeney. At the age of 12, he emigrated to the United States with his widowed mother and brother, surviving his first brush with death when he was thrown overboard by a huge wave.

Sweeney worked as an apprentice to a New York printing firm and joined a local militia, then mustered in with the New York Volunteers for the war with Mexico. His regiment was at the siege of Vera Cruz and followed Winfield Scott as he advanced into the interior. Sweeney was wounded in the groin at Cerro Gordo, but continued with the army. At Churubusco, he was wounded so badly that his right arm had to be amputated. By this time, fellow soldiers were calling him Fightin' Tom.

For most military men, this would have been a career-ending injury, but not Sweeney. Brevetted as a Captain, he received a commission in the 2nd New York Infantry and was posted to California, where he took part in the Yuma War (a series of engagements with Native Americans) from 1850 to 1853. Naturally, he was wounded by an arrow in the neck.



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FIGHTING TOM SWEENEY

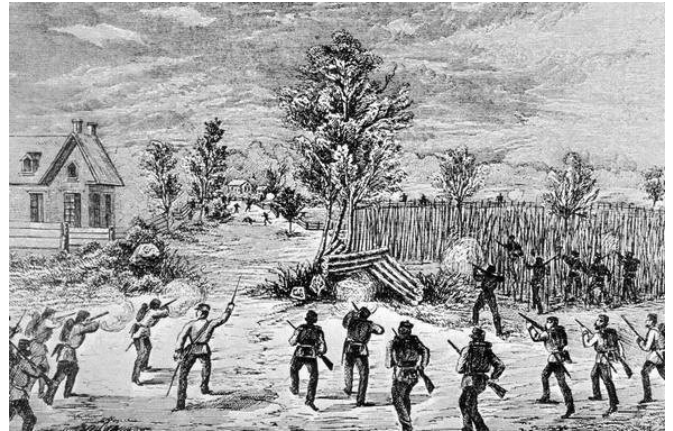
In 1854 he returned to New York, then joined his regiment at Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania, where they were training for service against the Sioux in the West. Six companies of the 2nd Infantry deployed to the Upper Missouri in 1855 and Lieutenant Sweeney served there over the course of several years, after which he had a two-year hitch on recruiting duty. As the Civil War broke out, Captain Sweeney was in command at the Federal Arsenal in St. Louis and played a major role in keeping Missouri from seceding from the Union.

As a Brigadier General in command of the Missouri Volunteers, he fought at Wilson's Creek and was again wounded, this time in the leg. He shrugged this off and returned to action in April 1862 as Colonel of the 52nd Illinois at Shiloh, where he refused to leave the field even after being wounded (again) in his leg and taking yet another bullet in his remaining arm. Still not done, he returned to action in October at the Battle of Corinth, where his performance earned him promotion as Brigadier General of US Volunteers.



Sweeney monument at Shiloh
(George Ostertag/Alamy Stock Photo)

Sweeney was not done fighting yet; he commanded a division in the Atlanta Campaign, but found himself at odds with General Grenville Dodge, commander of the XVI Corps, following the Battle of Atlanta. Dodge personally took Sweeney's division into battle against John Bell Hood's flank attack, which offended Sweeney so much that he got drunk and started a fistfight with Dodge, despite the fact that Dodge was his superior officer, eleven years younger, and had one more fist than Sweeney did. Sweeney was arrested and court martialed, but was acquitted. In April 1865 Sweeney was a member of the guard of honor in charge of President Lincoln's body as the funeral train passed through New York.



Fenian Invasion of Canada, 1866
(Canadian Military Heritage)

STILL not done fighting, Sweeney mustered out of the army in August 1865 and joined the Fenian Brotherhood in New York; he was chosen as its Secretary of War. In 1866 he commanded an ill-fated invasion of Canada. The Fenians wanted to hold Canada hostage to persuade Britain to give Ireland its freedom. Armed with surplus US Army weapons, his force was the first one to be referred to as the Irish Republican Army. The invasion soon fell

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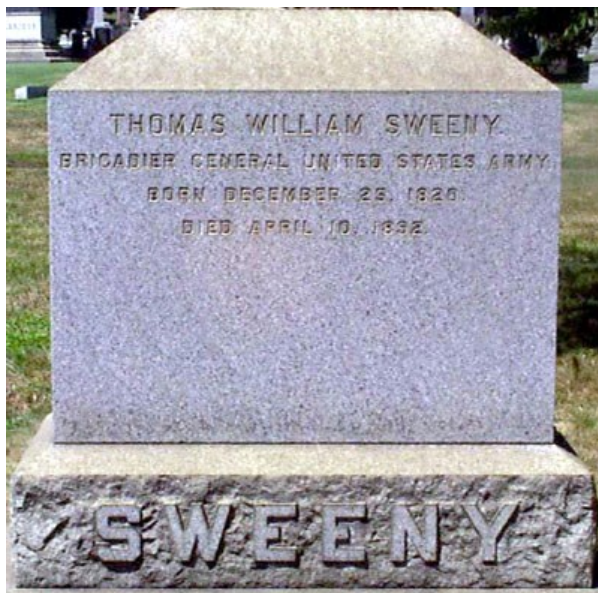
FIGHTING TOM SWEENEY

apart. Sweeney was arrested for violating American neutrality laws, but later was released and returned to the US Army at the rank of Major. He retired in 1870 as a Brigadier General.

There is a story, probably apocryphal, that Sweeney and General Philip Kearney (who also lost an arm, his left, at Churubusco) would shop for a single pair of gloves, each of them taking one, and when attending the theater, they would applaud as a team. A good story, even if it can't be corroborated.

Sweeney may have been a fighting man, but he also apparently was a romantic sort, marrying twice and having children with both wives. His papers at the Huntington Library in California include a series of gossipy letters to his first wife, Eleanor, while he was at Carlisle Barracks in 1854 and early 1855.

Fightin' Tom retired in 1870 to Astoria (Queens), New York, where he died on April 10, 1892 at the age of 71. His compassion for fellow soldiers was reflected in his final public service, an effort to build a home for Confederate war veterans in Austin, Texas. He was buried with military honors at Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn.



New member Chuck Hoskinson, who lives on Walney Road in Chantilly, says "the address is relevant to the Civil War for two reasons: 1. The house belonged to Mosby's Ranger George Turberville, who's buried in the cemetery on the property; Mosby had also been here. 2. The house was occupied by Union troops in the winter of 1862-63 and again in 1864 when it was a picket post. A previous owner found a VMM buckle on the property, and I've been able to establish that the pickets were from a Maine regiment. But of course I've been interested in the Civil War since I was a boy growing up in Alexandria and I've studied it extensively. I really enjoy getting together with others to compare notes and discuss the history."



Sweeney Carte de Visite
(Tom Glass Collection)



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WASHINGTON'S MARINES: THE ORIGINS OF THE CORPS AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 1775-1777

By Maj. Gen. Jason Q. Bohm

The fighting prowess of United States Marines is second to none, but few know of the Corps' humble beginnings and what it achieved during the early years of the American Revolution. Jason Bohm rectifies this oversight by weaving the men, strategy, performance, and personalities of the Corps' formative early years into a single story.

Jan 25 / 7:00p-8:30p Th

FREEDOM'S WORDS RINGING HOLLOW

By Larry Howard

Historian Larry Howard examines the perspectives of enslaved or formerly enslaved Virginians to determine their perspectives on the political ideas of America's Founding Fathers.

Feb 22 / 7:00p-8:30p Th

SMALL BUT IMPORTANT RIOTS: THE CAVALRY BATTLES OF ALDIE, MIDDLEBURG, AND UPPERVILLE

By Robert F. O'Neill

Small but Important Riots focuses on the fighting from June 17 to 22, 1863, at Aldie, Middleburg, and Upperville, placed within the strategic context of the Gettysburg campaign. It is based on Robert O'Neill's thirty years of research and access to previously unpublished documents, which reveal startling new information.

Mar 28 / 7:00p-8:30p Th

VIRGINIA POW CAMPS IN WORLD WAR II

By Kathryn Coker

During World War II, Virginians watched as German and Italian prisoners invaded the Old Dominion. At least 17,000 Germans and countless Italians lived in over twenty camps across the state and worked on five military installations. Historian Kathryn Coker tells a different story of the Old Dominion at war.

Apr 25 / 7:00p-8:30p Th

Call (703) 367-7872 for more information.



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