THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
November 2025, Volume 22, Issue 11

Speaker: Jonathan Noyalas
Topic: "The Battle of Cool Springs"
When: November 10, 2025
Location: Brock's Riverside Grill
Times: Social Time Begins 6:00 pm, Dinner 6:45 pm, Meeting Begins 7:30 pm
Our Website: www.rappvalleycivilwar.org
Our Facebook: www.facebook.com/rvcwrt

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Jonathan Noyalas "The Battle of Cool Springs"

Jonathan A. Noyalas holds the Hugh & Virginia McCormick Chair in Civil War History at Shenandoah University and is the director of Shenandoah University's McCormick Civil War Institute. He is the author or editor of seventeen books including most recently General Phillip H. Sheridan: Life, War, and Memory (Routledge) and *The Blood-Tinted Waters of the Shenandoah: The 1864 Valley Campaign's Battle of Cool Spring* (Savas Beatie) and has authored more than 100 articles, essays, chapters, and

reviews in a variety of popular and scholarly publications. He has appeared on NPR's "With Good Reason," C-SPAN's American History TV, and PCN and consulted on various public history projects with the National Park Service, American Battlefield Trust, National Geographic, and Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District. Prof. Noyalas is the recipient of numerous awards for his teaching and scholarship, including Shenandoah University's Exemplary Teaching Award for the First Year Seminar, Shenandoah's Wilkins Award, and the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia's Outstanding Faculty Award, which is the highest honor that can be awarded to anyone teaching at a college or university in the Old Dominion.

When Confederate general Jubal Early's army withdrew from Washington, DC, on the night of July 12, 1864, President Abraham Lincoln wanted Early pursued and destroyed. This presentation, based on Prof. Jonathan A. Noyalas's book *The Blood-Tinted Waters of the Shenandoah*, will explore that pursuit which culminated along the banks of the Shenandoah River in Clarke County, Virginia, on July 18, 1864, in the Battle of Cool Spring--the largest and bloodiest engagement fought in Clarke County, Virginia, during the conflict. Noyalas's presentation will explore the battle of Cool Spring, how it impacted the Union and Confederate soldiers who fought there and their families, and how what happened on July 18, 1864, sparked a postwar battle among Union veterans.

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"Dear Uncles: The Civil War Letters of Arthur McKinstry, a Soldier in the Excelsior Brigade" by Rick Barram

A Review of the October 2025 Program by Greg Mertz

Arthur McKinstry was living in Chautauqua County, New York when at age fifteen he received an appointment to attend the U.S. Naval Academy. Even though his letters demonstrate that he was very intelligent, McKinstry was apparently not mature enough or lacked the discipline to succeed at Annapolis. After only one year he had accumulated a substantial number of demerits, fell behind in his studies, was judged to be unfit for naval service and was expelled.

When the Civil War broke out, McKinstry fell in with one of the militia companies from Chautauqua County which was recruited into what was first

called the “Third Excelsior regiment” in a brigade of five all-New York regiments formed by Congressman Daniel E. Sickles, known as the Excelsior (meaning “ever upward”) Brigade. The recruitment station was on Staten Island, and in order to sign up some five thousand men to make up the brigade, Sickles was willing to accept virtually anybody, including a substantial number of men who were void of character. Father Joseph O’Hagan declared “such a collection of men was never united in one body since the Flood,” adding “many were the scum of New York society.”

McKinstry’s own observations confirmed O’Hagan’s assessments. “Our boys from Chautauqua County are in excellent trim,” McKinstry wrote of the five companies from the western part of the state, but the rest were from “the very dregs of humanity” and “all are outrageously filthy.”

McKinstry belonged to a regiment that would become more prominently known as the 72nd New York Infantry. McKinstry would in essence be an imbedded reporter for his two uncles who were editors of the Fredonia Censor newspaper, supplying him with such things as paper, stamps, and an ink stand.

McKinstry greatly admired his colonel, Nelson Taylor, who demonstrated that he cared for the well-being of his men while still instilling them with discipline and thoroughly drilling the men. “Drunkenness is an offense he has little leniency for” McKinstry wrote, and he concluding that “the effects of military life upon the minds of young men will certainly be good.”

Early in the Civil War the U.S. Navy was tasked with keeping the Potomac River open to shipping, while also preventing pro-Confederate Marylanders from crossing the river into Virginia to either join or provide supplies to the Confederate war effort. After the Battle of First Bull Run in July of 1861, the Excelsior Brigade left Staten Island and was sent to Washington DC. As they passed by Baltimore, some cheered to welcome them, while others were heard shouting “hurrah for Jeff Davis.”

The troops soon departed the hill upon which they were stationed near the capitol and began patrolling what McKinstry referred to as “the doubtful part of Maryland”. The citizens in the region, McKinstry wrote, would rather feed their milk to their hogs than sell it to Federal soldiers for forty cents a gallon. He met a farmer and his family who had recently moved to Maryland from Connecticut and could not help but contrast the neatness of their house and

their intelligence to the “ignorance and almost bestial degradation of some of their neighbors.” On another patrol to Piscataway, Maryland, McKinstry was appalled by its appearance declaring that two-thirds of its houses “a northern farmer would not allow to disgrace his farm.”

On October 18, 1861, the assignment of the regiment shifted from going on patrols in Maryland to being positioned in Maryland as part of Gen. Joseph Hooker’s division to assist with shutting down the traffic across the Potomac. While in camp, one of the soldiers in the regiment decided to put a hot ember in an unexploded cannon ball, killing the soldier instantly and mortally wounding another. One evening after the men had all turned in for the night, McKinstry stuck his head out of his tent he shared with seven others and started cawing like a crow. Soon the entire camp joined in making a variety of animal noises for three minutes before they were soon all quiet again.

Samuel Cox, a captain in the Maryland militia and well-known secessionist whose sons had joined the Confederate army, had a championship horse name Gray Maddox. Sickles had the horse confiscated for his own use. Cox got the horse back through legal means before the troops departed Maryland for the Peninsula Campaign.

The Senate did not confirm Sickles’s appointment to Brigadier General, but Lincoln needed the support of the War Democrats, and renominated Sickles again. The troops felt that Sickles was absent too much and had not been training on how to become a soldier as they had been doing, prompting McKinstry to write: “we believe Present Lincoln has been bamboozled,” hoping that the Senate will once again save the army from this incompetent soldier. Sickles was confirmed by one vote.

On the Peninsula the Excelsior Brigade was part of the III Corps under Gen. Samuel Peter Heintzelman. After the Confederates abandoned their Yorktown line, the III Corps was in the advance as the Federal army approached the Confederate position at Williamsburg. As preliminary news of the battle of Williamsburg reached the people of Chautauqua County, it appeared that the five companies from the area may have suffered significant losses. As the casualty list was later published, three of the eight men together in the tent on the night of the animal sounds were killed at Williamsburg, including Arthur McKinstry, now buried in the Williamsburg

National Cemetery. Out of about 800 men in the regiment, 195 men were casualties in the battle of Williamsburg.

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Important Information about the Park's Buildings

I would like to thank Alan Zirkle for putting this message out with his History Alert emails. If you are not subscribed to Alan's emails, here is some important maintenance and hours information for the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center and Chatham Manor. Upcoming maintenance projects will cause Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center and Chatham to close on August 4, 2025. Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center will close for 6 to 7 months while the building undergoes multiple construction projects including the installation of a fire suppression system, a waterline upgrade project, and an electrical system upgrade. The Park Store next to the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center will remain open daily, 9 am-5 pm, and park staff will be available to provide education and orientation to the battlefield through mid-October, after which park staff will be available on a reduced schedule.

The Chatham gate will remain open 9 am-5 pm through the duration of the project. Chatham will close for about a year for an interior rehabilitation project that will include lead paint encapsulation, new carpet, and plaster repair. Chatham underwent a fire suppression system installation this past year, but it has been partially open throughout the summer for increased visitation in the interim between these two large projects.

To explore these locations independently, check out the self-guided audio tours of the Sunken Road and Chatham available on the NPS App and online at go.nps.gov/frsp-tours. Park staff look forward to welcoming visitors to our upgraded facilities in spring and summer 2026!

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Friends of Central Virginia Battlefield Trust

As you know CVBT is a land trust. We focus on purchasing endangered battlefield properties. We do produce a large three-day annual conference,

standalone events and need to interpret and maintain our lands, we need help in all of these. In the past, CVBT has had individuals from organizations assist us, and we are grateful, but now we would like to create an official volunteer group who would enjoy being part of CVBT's volunteer core.

We have created "**The Friends of CVBT**." The intent is for this all-volunteer group is to be the "On Call" core of CVBT's volunteer group assisting in events and battlefield related needs. Active volunteer members will have the unique opportunity to be involved with events hosted by nationally acclaimed historians, assist in tours, and work on preserved battlefields. Participating volunteers will also be enrolled in the membership ranks of CVBT every year they contribute. CVBT will provide each volunteer with a CVBT volunteer staff shirt and CVBT official hat to wear at events or whenever wanted. We will be limiting this new group to 18 volunteers.

CVBT is now beginning our 27th year of preserving our local battlefields, the very battlefields you study and walk upon. We would be honored to have you join the ranks of CVBT volunteers to help us further our mission of preserving our Nation's history.

If interested please email our Executive Director **Terry Rensel** at **executivedirector@cvbt.org** .
Office: 540-374-0900

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CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF FREDERICKSBURG (CWRTF)

CWRTF meets 9 times a year on designated Wednesdays at Mary Washington Jepson Alumni Executive Center, 1119 Hanover Street. They offer a buffet dinner followed by a Civil War-themed presentation. Reservations are required. Speaker/topic schedule can be found on their website at www.cwrtf.org, and will be updated here. Below is the schedule starting in September 2025 and going to June 2026.

November 19, 2025
The Pathfinder and the President: John C. Fremont, Abraham Lincoln, and the Battle for Emancipation
Speaker: John Bicknell

January 28, 2026
Disaster in Pursuit of Lincoln's Killer
Speaker: Karen Stone

February 25, 2026
Meade and Lee's Commanding Machines at Gettysburg
Speaker: Doug Douds

March 25, 2026
The Richmond Bread Riots
Speaker: Ashley Whitehead Luskey

April 22, 2026
John Brown: Igniting the Keg
Speaker: Dennis Frye

May 27, 2026
The Appomattox Campaign
Speaker: Hampton Newsome

June 17, 2026
Teacher, Preacher, Soldier, Spy: John R. Kelso
Speaker: Christopher Grasso

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Who We Are

The Drum and Bugle Newsletter is published monthly by the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table, Post Office Box 7632, Fredericksburg VA 22404. The newsletter is available on our website at **www.rappvalleycivilwar.org**. Yearly membership dues are $40 for individuals and $50 for families. Students are free. Membership is open to anyone interested in the military, political and social history of the American Civil War.

Newsletter Editor and Webmaster: John Roos

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The RVCWRT Executive Committee

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