



## **THE DRUM & BUGLE**

**Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table**

**Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table Newsletter  
October 2016, Volume 13, Issue 10**

**Speaker:** Edward Alexander  
**Topic:** "Dawn of Victory: Breakthrough at Petersburg; March 25 to April 2, 1865"  
**When:** Monday, October 10, 2016  
**Location:** Brock's Riverside Grill  
**Times:** Social Begins 6:00 pm, Dinner 6:45 pm, Meeting Begins 7:30 pm

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### **Abstract on our Scheduled Speaker, Edward Alexander, Monday, October 10, 2016**

Edward Alexander is a historian at *Pamplin Historical Park* in Petersburg, Virginia, where his duties vary from chainsaw use along the battlefield trails to preparing exhibit designs. A graduate of the University of Illinois, Alexander gained his first public history experience as an intern with *Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park* in 2010. While there he took an interest in the *Sixth Corps of the Army of the Potomac*, a unit he has continued to study from Second Fredericksburg through the Corps' Petersburg breakthrough. Alexander is a contributing historian with the *Emerging Civil War* and he is editor of their new Digital Series. His first book, *Dawn of Victory: Breakthrough at Petersburg, March 25 - April 2, 1865*, was published in 2015 in Savas Beatie's *Emerging Civil War Series*. Alexander currently resides in Richmond, Virginia.

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### **The RVCWRT Bulletin Board**

We maintain a special bulletin board that is placed against the right side wall as guests enter the dining room. This Bulletin Board is utilized during each of our dinner meetings. Members will find many different Civil War articles placed there, these are there to be requested by members for their personal reading. Also, there will be information posted on the bulletin board about upcoming Civil War related events along with various items of interest. Along with the posted announcements, Civil War articles and various related material placed there, these may each be requested and borrowed.

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### **RVCWRT History Alert Program**

RVCWRT member Alan Zirkle, provides a totally free service to all RVCWRT members notifying his many subscribers about upcoming local history events in and around the Fredericksburg area. This is done via his subscribers recorded e-mail address, concerning upcoming history-related events. To receive Alan's important messages just send an e-mail to Alan Zirkle @ [az@azirkle.com](mailto:az@azirkle.com).

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**Remember: Please contact Bob Jones to order your Dinner in advance and to Confirm Your Reservations: Telephone 540-399-1702 or e-mail [cwrtedinner@yahoo.com](mailto:cwrtedinner@yahoo.com)**

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## "Such is War: The Looting of Fredericksburg"

By Beth Parnicza

A Review of our September 2016 program by Greg Mertz

Our September speaker, Beth Parnicza, began her program with some probing questions pertaining to her topic. What types of things do we associate with the term "*hard war*?" How do people react when the normal ways of expressing one's feelings collapse or are not accessible? The looting of the city of Fredericksburg is often attributed to the Civil War evolving into a "*hard war*." It is also often explained as the most accessible outlet for releasing the frustration of the soldier who's left with no other means of expression.

The Union army did not plan on looting Fredericksburg as they approached the city in the late fall of 1862. They intended to march quickly through the city. That blueprint had changed when the pontoon bridges needed to cross the river did not arrive when expected. Even an alternative plan failed when after waiting nearly two weeks for the bridges to arrive. It took all day for the Union engineers to construct the bridges. The problems with the execution of the Union plans placed the Union army in the heart of the city of Fredericksburg on the very eve of battle.

The city of Fredericksburg was largely unoccupied; most of Fredericksburg's citizens had evacuated the town. The city had been used by the Confederates for military purposes as they resisted the Union army's bridge construction and engaged in street fighting. The city had been shelled and some of it was burning when the soldiers entered it. The Union soldiers then further contributed to the destruction by their looting. Fredericksburg became the first city in America to be looted since the British had sacked Washington during the War of 1812.

Parnicza took a look at just what happened during the looting and some of the reasons why it occurred. The looting is controversial: descendants of a Union soldier, for example, insisted that their ancestor "*picked up*" a McGuffey Reader that they had in their possession – claiming that it was not "*stolen*."

Some Union soldiers openly gathered souvenirs. Tea cups were common keepsakes. They were small and easy to carry, plus the soldiers could also make good use of them. Many had turned the looting into a competition. Harvard graduate Henry L. Abbott indicated that his efforts at looting began too late to get any silver, and he admitted to having gone through all of the houses in search of highly coveted things.

The gathering of basic comforts was very common among those activities documented during the looting. Food, blankets, tobacco and mattresses were commonly taken by Union soldiers. One soldier who took a cup rationalized that he needed the cup in order to obtain a special comfort – he needed a container for the butter he took.

Soldiers dressing in women's clothing were also frequent activities. The inspector general discovered a Union picket line in which every soldier was wearing women's clothes. The wearing of ladies bonnets was a familiar scene.

A stretch of Caroline Street was noted for its carnival and cotillion - like atmosphere. This section of town had become one large party. Soldiers wearing fine silk dresses were escorted by soldiers in tails and top hats. Buggy rides were freely given to all.

Another widespread observation was the blatant destruction of so many personal items. Evidently this destruction was done for the sole purpose of making sure that the owners could no longer use or enjoy the objects destroyed.

What were some of the reasons for the looting of Fredericksburg? Some soldiers were just releasing their anxiety. Some were trying to enjoy themselves – for what might be the last night of their lives. Some may have been purposely deriding the Southern way of life or even mocking Southern women.

How did the Union soldiers rationalize their behavior? Would the looting be justified? One Union soldier wrote that since the Confederates defended the town against their efforts, they were of course going to ransack the city. When Robert E. Lee concluded that he could not simply permit the Federals to cross the river and decided to post Confederate troops in the town of Fredericksburg. He certainly realized that the Union army would fire upon them.

One soldier from Nantucket observed the similarities between his hometown and Fredericksburg, and Parnicza was surprised that he did not conclude that it would be awful for

Fredericksburg to meet a fate that he would not wish upon his home town of Nantucket. This soldier reasoned that an opposing army could indeed invade Nantucket and thus steal their possessions.

The soldiers had not just grown callous to ravaging civilian property, but had become insensitive to other horrors as well. One soldier observed a hog feasting upon a dead soldier but he was too busy stealing things to shoo the pig away from the corpse.

Because the town of Fredericksburg was a secessionist town, their homes were considered to be legitimate targets and anything that would sustain them in their livelihoods was also a fair target for destruction, this as reasoned by a Union soldier. Parnicza concluded by observing that ironically the looting of Fredericksburg had another consequence that made it even more difficult for the Union soldiers to achieve an ultimate victory: it thus drove the residents of Fredericksburg further from the Union and it stiffened even further the Confederacy's resolve to fight on to the bitter end.

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**Moses Jacob Ezekeil photographed in 1914**

Moses, one of the heroic VMI Cadets who fought at the *Battle of New Market*, he was *Sergeant Moses Jacob Ezekiel*. Moses served as Sergeant of Cadet Company C until the end of the war. After the *Battle of New Market*, Sergeant Ezekiel and Company C spent the remainder of the war fighting from the trenches, defending his home state and native city of Richmond, Virginia. Moses was the first *Jewish* Cadet to enter, attend and graduate VMI. Along with other members of his class, he returned in 1866, to graduate.

As a young man, Moses sought a public education at America's first State Military College, i.e., VMI. Although, still a student attending VMI, Moses fought on May 15, 1864, as a member of the VMI Cadet Battalion at the *Battle of New Market*. Moses witnessed the death and maiming of some of his closest friends at *New Market*. Upon his graduation in 1866, Moses launched a brilliantly successful artistic career in Europe. Despite living a long life as an *émigré* in Italy, Moses always remained close to Virginia and to his American roots.

Born October 28, 1844, on *Old Market Street* in Richmond, VA, Moses was the youngest of the 14 Ezekiel children. Their family home was located in an extremely poverty-stricken neighborhood. The family later moved to and lived in a house (demolished in the 1930's) on the southeast corner of Marshall and 112th streets in Richmond. Ezekiel's grandparents were of *Spanish-Jewish* origin and had immigrated to the United States from Holland in 1808. It had been over 400-years earlier, that the Ezekiel family fled to Holland from Spain, escaping the infamous *Spanish Inquisition*. Upon the opening of the Civil War Ezekiel quit school, engaging in a mercantile business. Then, deciding to better himself, he wanted to go to VMI. Since VMI was a public college and being, under a wartime regime, it was one of the few institutions available at reasonable cost. Considering his lack of academic preparation Moses was fortunate to be accepted at VMI. His mother, Catherine de Castro Ezekiel, admonished Moses, upon sending him off to VMI to learn the art of war, explaining that she would not have a son who would not fight for his home or country.

Considering the well-documented anti-Semitic prejudice which prevailed in the Southern Capital and in most of the Northern States, his mother's statement displays a courageous, but quite benevolent attitude, which Moses appeared to share. A contemporary description of Civil War Richmond points out how the Northern states and the city of Richmond were so disposed is shown in H. M. Sachar's book *A History of the Jews in America (1992)*. It amazes me, that Sachar does not mention Ezekiel in the section of his book concerning the Civil War. Yet, Sachar does demonstrate something of the poisoned atmosphere in Richmond and offers the following from an article verified to be from the *Richmond Examiner* . . . "One has but to walk through the streets and stores of Richmond, to get an impression of the vast number of unkempt Israelites in our markets - Every auction room is packed with greasy Jews - Let one observe the number of wheezing Jewish matrons elbowing soldiers' families out of their way along with the more respectable people in the community."

Ezekiel entered VMI in September 1862, as part of the Class of 1866. This class originally contained 147 members. The 1866, class included the son of a Virginia governor, and sons of professional and landed classes throughout the state. It also included, due to need-based scholarships known as state cadetships, the sons of Virginia's poorer families. Ultimately, Moses graduated last among ten graduates on July 4, 1866, (*all were members of the New Market Cadet Corps*). Later, 45 other living members of his class, including 36 fellow members of the *New Market Cadet Corps* were declared "war graduates" and thus all 45 were ranked behind Moses.

Moses once explained his reasons for going to VMI and, by implication, in his fighting for the Confederacy. He asserted that he'd gone to VMI, not to defend slavery - an institution which, to his thinking, had been inherited and limited by the State of Virginia. Rather, just like so many others it was for his home state that he fought. Moses in fact, asserted that he went there to defend Virginia, as she had seceded to avoid providing troops to the Union which would "*subjugate her sister Southern States*". His views were typical of other VMI cadets of that period. However, Moses ignored the fact that his state had the largest slave population in the entire South. Also, over the previous 30 years, i.e., prior to the Civil War, Virginia had exported over 200,000 slaves throughout the other Southern states.

As VMI's first Jewish cadet there were some unusual letters sent to VMI's Superintendent; for example, in March 1863, Superintendent Major General F. H. Smith had to gain Board of Visitor's permission for Moses to be furloughed to join his family for the "*Feast of Unleavened Bread*." Moses was the first of his family to go into a military school, and some reorientation at home was necessary: his grandfather wanted him excused from VMI's summer camp in 1863, this was for fear that Moses might catch some unknown "disease."

Moses' artistic talents left a lasting impression, but not just at VMI. In a 1940, letter to VMI from a lady in Shawsville, VA, she revealed that Moses' artistic talent had been evident very early on in his cadetship. She related, that Moses, while visiting Shawsville with fellow cadets J. K. Langhorne (VMI 1866) and M. D. Langhorne (VMI 1867), had sketched their sister sitting horseback, this as she waited near the train station for her brothers arrival. Miss Lizzie Langhorne, apparently never knew that she had been the subject of young cadet Ezekiel's artistic talents. Lizzie, later married J. M. Payne of Amherst, VA, and became the grandmother of VMI cadet, N. P. Gatling, VMI class of 1922.

Ezekiel's wartime service began as a member of the New Market "*Baby Corps*" that fought effectively as the 265-man VMI Cadet Battalion in the *Battle of New Market*. Moses participated in the fight as a member of Company C. He took part in the forced march from VMI to Staunton, Harrisonburg and then on to New Market. He fought in the front line of the assault on Union positions, which defeated Sigel's forces. The *Battle of New Market* saved Shenandoah's harvest for Rebel forces fighting in the East.

After the battle, Ezekiel focused his efforts on the sad mission of recovering his dead and wounded classmates. The small cadet battalion of 265 young men had suffered 24 percent casualties in the battle. Moses had at first walked across the battlefield along with his good friend B. A. Colonna. In concert, they searched for their mutual friend, Thomas Garland Jefferson, a direct descendant of our third President. Together they found young Jefferson, desperately wounded in his chest and lying alone in an out building of the farm whose field they had just fought across. Ezekiel ran, bare-footed (*his shoes were lost along with most of the other Cadets in the heavy mud during their assault*), into New Market to get a wagon to bring young Jefferson into town for medical treatment.

Moses took Jefferson to the home of Miss Lydie Clinedinst, who provided her family's home to the cadets. While young Jefferson remained in agonizing pain for more than two days, Ezekiel nursed him and read to him daily from the *New Testament* of the Bible. Then, on Tuesday evening, May 17, 1864, reading by candlelight, Moses again read to his dying *Christian* friend. Jefferson had requested passages from the *New Testament (John, Chapter 14): "In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."* Jefferson's fevered mind wandered and he at first thought Ezekiel was his mother, and then his sister. As he began to lose sight, Jefferson asked for light, Ezekiel later wrote "*Only then it dawned on me, that all hope was past and he was in his death agony.*" The Clinedinst family had gathered close by, as Ezekiel gently held his friend, who died in his arms.

After his actions at New Market, Ezekiel was promoted to first sergeant of Company C. He completed his VMI education in 1866. It had been interrupted by the burning VMI and its temporary relocation to the Richmond, Almshouse. This was of course during the Richmond-Petersburg Siege and the disbanding of the cadet corps, i.e., after the South's final surrender. It was in that final year of study at VMI, when Moses' artistic talent came to the attention of General Robert E. Lee, who had become a new resident in Lexington, VA. It was Mrs. Lee who actually invited Moses to tea and for a talk with her husband one afternoon. Moses was asked to bring his sketch book and it was General Lee who offered his advice and counsel to Moses. Lee took note of the quality of Ezekiel's talent and lent his support to Moses on continuing his education at the *Virginia Medical College*. At the Virginia Medical College, Ezekiel studied the human form. Later, Moses studied in Cincinnati, Ohio, for a time, then he left for Europe and for further

study in Germany. At the age of 29, Moses won the *Michel-Beer Prix de Rome*, he was the first non-German to ever win this. The prize money allowed him to go on to Rome and to make Rome his residence for the rest of his life. Subsequently, Moses was knighted by *King Victor Emmanuel of Italy* and also decorated by *King Humberto*. His body is interred at Arlington Cemetery.



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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. Each month, The Drum and Bugle newsletter is also placed on our web-site, [www.RVCWRT.org](http://www.RVCWRT.org). Yearly membership dues are still just \$30.00 for individuals, \$40.00 for families, and it's still only \$7.50 for students. Membership is open to anyone interested in the study of the Civil War and the ongoing preservation of Civil War sites.

#### *The RVCWRT Executive Committee:*

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