



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
July 2021, Volume 18, Issue 7

IN-PERSON DINNER MEETINGS CONTINUE IN JULY

Our first "live" dinner meeting in June (the first in 15 months) was a big success. On Monday, July 12, we are returning to our usual format and established protocols. We will be hosting speaker Sarah Kay Bierle (Chief Administrative Officer of Central Virginia Battlefields Trust) at Brock's Riverside Grill. Topic will be the Battle of New Market. Times will be as usual - social time at 6 PM, dinner at 6:45 PM, meeting at 7:30 PM.

We are again able to accommodate non-dinner attendees/spectators at our meetings. Interested visitors can view our presentations at no cost. It is requested that spectators arrive shortly before 7:30 PM and sit in a specially designated section.

Please make a dinner reservation through John Sapanara via email rappcwevents21@gmail.com or by phone 540-479-1299. John will contact you with confirmation. If you wish to be placed on the "permanent reservation" list, please advise John when you make your July reservation. Members on this list do not need to make reservations every month – their attendance is assumed unless they cancel beforehand. Member dinner price

for 2021 is **\$30**. This price also applies to non-member attendees who join at the meeting. Non-member dinner price is \$35.

“SEVEN DAYS” BUS TRIP ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2021

Sign up for our bus trip to sites associated with the Seven Days Battles. Cost is \$90 for members and guests until October 1. Cost includes bus transportation to five sites, lunch, site fees and guided tours throughout the day. Sign up now through John Sapanara via email to rappcwevents21@gmail.com or by phone 540-479-1299.

Speaker: Sarah Kay Bierle
Topic: Sigel and Breckenridge: Lessons in Leadership from the Battle of New Market
When: Monday July 12, 2021
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

“Sarah Kay Bierle: Sigel and Breckenridge: Lessons in Leadership from the Battle of New Market”

Sarah Kay Bierle graduated from Thomas Edison State University with a BA in History, serves as managing editor at Emerging Civil War, and works on staff at Central Virginia Battlefields Trust. She has spent years exploring ways to share quality historical research in way that will inform and inspire modern audiences, including school presentations, writing, and speaking engagements. Sarah has published three historical fiction books and her first nonfiction book, *Call Out The Cadets: The Battle of New Market*, is part of the Emerging Civil War series.

Two generals, two different life stories, and one battlefield where they clashed. This presentation examines the lives and experiences of Union General Franz Sigel and Confederate General John C. Breckinridge and how their leadership styles and decisions changed history on a rainy afternoon near the crossroads town of New Market on May 15, 1864.

Remember that you can watch all ten previous RVCWRT virtual programs in their entirety by searching "RVCWRT" on YouTube. Our speaker lineup for 2021 is now available on our new website: www.rappvalleycivilwar.org.

"A Troubled Town: Dranesville and its People, 1861"
by Ryan Quint
A Review of the May 2021 Program by Greg Mertz

Most battles are fought because of the strategic importance of the location. Not so with the December 20, 1861 battle of Dranesville, a town with a population of about 500 in Fairfax County, located midway between Leesburg, Virginia and Washington, DC. The Union army initiated the battle because of the actions of the civilians in the town. The Union soldiers came to Dranesville to retaliate for deeds done by pro-secessionist civilians toward loyal citizens and other Union soldiers. Both Union and Confederate soldiers were also seeking to gather food in the Dranesville vicinity as well.

The heart of the issue was the vote taken on May 23, 1861 after the firing on Fort Sumter and in the wake of Lincoln's call for all loyal states to provide troops to put down the rebellion. While Virginia had decided to stay in the Union when delegates from each community voted prior to the outbreak of war in Charleston harbor, the Commonwealth of Virginia, including Fairfax County, voted overwhelmingly to secede the month after the war began.

Our speaker, Ryan Quint, pointed out that this vote was not via secret ballot as we are so accustomed with today. The vote was either done by a public roll call or by placing the ballot in the appropriate box for the issue at hand. So, not only was the Dranesville vote 107 in favor of secession and 4 votes against it, everyone in the community knew the names of the four Unionists.

Two of the most vocal secessionists in Dranesville were a pair of brothers who were both doctors – William B. Day and John T. Day. Unionist Howard Lasher was told by Dr. William B. Day that he would "mark him." Dr. John T. Day had an 18-inch Bowie Knife made for him, and that he wielded it about town proclaiming that he would use it to cut the hearts out of Union men.

The Days were said to be active in a Home Guard unit, whose main activity was to harass local Unionists. Leveritt H. Bishop was a 75-year-old man

whose son voted to stay in the Union. The elder Bishop was arrested, sent to prison in Richmond, was released and had to walk home, but was jailed again when he reached Warrenton. Bishop is believed to have died there and is likely buried in an unmarked grave near the jail.

The 34th New York infantry was stationed on the Potomac River guarding the canal locks at a point about five miles north of Dranesville. The soldiers often helped themselves to food in the fields on the Virginia side of the river. The Dranesville Home Guard decided to lay in ambush on an evening when Captain Wells Sponable and three privates of the 34th New York advanced toward a cornfield. The Home Guard fired a volley killing Private Oliver Darling and wounding Private Robert Gracey. Gracey indicated that he was taken to the Drs. Day, where he suffered for two weeks as they refused to help him. Gracey escaped, shared his story and hoped for revenge.

On November 25, 1861, three of the enslaved people from one of the pro-secessionist Coleman families entered the Union camp and spoke with Gen. Winfield S. Hancock. They supplied the names of those whom they had heard arranged for the ambush of the soldiers in the 39th New York.

Gen. George B. McClellan demanded that something be done about the situation and George Bayard with the 1st Pennsylvania Cavalry were tasked with arresting the ten people on the list provided by those enslaved by the Colemans. Confederate Scout William Farley and a mere three others boldly set up an ambush for the 900 troopers in the cavalry regiment. In the clash, Thomas Coleman (part of the family who owned the slaves who provided the information) was shot and died on November 27, 1861. Union Gen. George G. Meade also found and arrested two more Colemans on the list.

On December 18 Jane Creppin, a Unionist and a spy, passed along information of a plan by the Home Guard to capture more Unionists. It led to the December 20, 1861 battle of Dranesville. The fight entailed Pennsylvania Reserve troops under Gen. Edward O. C. Ord clashing with Confederate infantrymen assigned to picket duty on that day, under the direction of cavalryman J.E.B. Stuart. Ord suffered 60 casualties, repulsing Stuart who lost about 250 men. The Union victory raised the morale of the troops, since Union forces had lost the battles of Bull Run and Ball's Bluff in 1861.

During the battle, the federal soldiers also captured one of the civilians who had alluded them from the list provided by the Coleman slaves. Otherwise, the Dranesville community contained wives and children, while the men were either in military service, or had gone to another community to escape harassment, or were in prison.

Those captured by the Union soldiers were held in the Old Capitol Prison awaiting their fate. The prisoners indicated that they did not know why they were being held. The evidence against most of them was hearsay – the Coleman slaves “heard” that the men whose names they provided were involved in the ambush. No one was quite sure what to do with the prisoners.

Detective Alan Pinkerton was assigned to investigate, leading to the February, 1862 Executive Order #2 on how to try cases pertaining to disloyal subjects. A military commission headed up by Judge Edwards Pierrepont and Gen. John A. Dix was tasked with the issue. All of the Dranesville citizens accused of harassing pro-Union neighbors were released except for the Drs. Day, who each posted a \$20,000 bond and took the loyalty oath.

After the war ended, the community seemed to be able to put their early war differences aside and the Drs. Day once again became respectable members of Dranesville.

“Tempest at Ox Hill”

by David Welker

A Review of the June 2021 Program by Greg Mertz

The little-known September 1, 1862 battle of Ox Hill or Chantilly, is often overlooked because it is sandwiched between the major battles of Second Manassas (August 29-30) and Antietam (September 17). The obscure action had some significant consequences, however, including the loss of two of the most aggressive generals in the Union army.

Following the battle of First Manassas, the defeated Union army fell back in chaos. One year later, after the battle of Second Manassas, the Union army was once again beaten, but this time fell back in an orderly manner. The Union commander at the second battle, Gen. John Pope, was a broken man seeking to save his army and his career, stated our speaker, David Welker. While each of Pope’s corps commanders advocated retreat, the relatively new general-in-chief, Gen. Henry Halleck, ordered an attack. Though

Pope's subordinates were astounded that he had rejected their counsel, Welker feels that Pope made some important decisions that kept several various options available to his army. In doing so, Pope laid down the foundation that would have long-term consequences and save his army.

After resting on August 31, Confederate army commander Gen. Robert E. Lee held half of his army under Gen. James Longstreet on the Manassas battlefield making feints against Pope's army at Centreville to the east. While the Union forces were hopefully distracted by the demonstration, Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson with the other half of the army marched north and then east toward Jermantown – further east of Centreville, in Pope's rear.

While Jackson pushed his men, Confederate cavalry commander Gen. J.E.B. Stuart rode ahead to Jermantown, where he opened fire on Union supply wagons and its infantry guard. After participating in a social gathering following the skirmish, Stuart finally got around to informing Jackson of his findings, while also inadvertently alerting the Union army of Confederate activity.

Pope ordered a probe and learned that Confederate infantry (Jackson) was moving on Ox Hill around his right flank. Pope made arrangements for an assault that none of his subordinates supported. Pope unselfishly acted to save his army at the potential expense of his career, ordering portions of the IX corps and III corps to attack.

Commanding a division of the IX corps was Gen. Isaac Stevens. Graduating first in his West Point class of 1839, Stevens served in the Mexican War with fellow engineer R.E. Lee, and was wounded in his foot at Chapultepec. Stevens supported the presidency of Franklin Pierce, a Democrat noted for being soft on defense, and Pierce was elected, Stevens was named governor of the Washington territory. The territory also included what would become the state of Oregon. Stevens was friends with Senator Joseph Lane of Oregon, who was the vice-presidential candidate on the Southern Democrat ticket with John C. Breckinridge in the 1860 election. Only with the outbreak of the Civil War did Lincoln's Republican administration express an interest in the Democrat Stevens, who was assigned to take command of the 79th New York.

As Stevens approached the Confederate line of two brigades along a fence at Ox Hill, he developed a plan to turn the left flank of Gen. Charles Fields' brigade, when the IX corps commander, Gen. Jesse L. Reno, arrived at the front. As Stevens updated Reno on the situation and his plans, Reno grasped that Stevens had a good proposal. But in the amount of time between pausing to brief Reno and the attack, the Confederates no longer had just two brigades on the field, and the Union army was no longer striking a flank. The wind kicked up, the sky darkened and a storm erupted at the moment the fighting began. Among the crash of thunder, the lightning and the rain, Stevens learned that his right flank was in danger. Stevens was behind his original command, the 79th New York, when its color bearer fell. Stevens picked up the flag and advanced to the Confederate position at the fence where he was shot in the head and killed.

Gen. Harry Hays' Confederate brigade, holding a vulnerable salient in the line, was forced back by Stevens' attack, but Gen. Edward L. Thomas' brigade plugged the gap, when Union troops under Gen. Philip Kearny arrived at the front. Kearny was born into a wealthy family including founding members of the New York Stock Exchange. He graduated from the Columbia Law School, but longed to be a soldier. When an uncle left Philip a large inheritance, he joined the army. During the Mexican War, he lost an arm at Churubusco, where future Confederate General Richard S. Ewell carried Kearny to the rear.

Kearny rode onto the field with Gen. David B. Birney's brigade and a pair of batteries. Kearny ordered Col. William S. Clark's 21st Massachusetts into the fight, but noticed the regiment was not moving, and rode to the front to discover why. When confronting the commander, Clark explained that the Confederate line was directly in front of them, and pointed out some Confederate prisoners to prove that the unit had closed with the enemy. "Damn you and your prisoners!" shouted Kearny, further proclaiming that he would show him where to go. Kearny rode up to the Confederate position, identified the unit in his front as the 49th Georgia of Thomas' brigade, realized his mistake, and tried to ride away on the side of his horse "Indian style" when he was killed by a single bullet.

The battle lines were so close that troops on both sides called upon the other to surrender. The fighting suddenly stopped at about 7 pm., the Union forces

disengaged, and the 2 ½ hour battle was over. Pope had committed 6,000 men in this attack on some 15,000 Confederates. The battle of Ox Hill or Chantilly resulted in some 655 Union and 516 Confederate casualties fighting to a tactical draw. The loss of two fighting generals in an army noted for cautious leaders altered the course of the war, Welker contended. The development of the battlefield, with only 2 ½ acres protected, also sparked the national Civil War preservation movement.

MEANINGFUL WORDS FROM A MASTER OF HIS CRAFT

“It is clear enough that the Civil War was a watershed experience for America. . . The ultimate meaning of that war depends on what we do now. We are still involved in it. When we move to make a living reality out of the great ideal of the equality of all Americans; when we take our stand anywhere in the world for freedom, and for just dealing between all races and conditions of man; when we work for an enduring unity among human beings, whether at home or abroad—when we do any of these things we are simply trying to meet the obligation that was laid upon us a century ago at a price higher than any other price we ever paid.”

Bruce Catton from ON WRITING ABOUT THE CIVIL WAR, American Heritage, April 1966

Lee's Luck By John Roos

Robert E. Lee is arguable one of the finest commanders to emerge in American history. The victories he would achieve came at great risk but also with great luck. Many times Lee would find more luck on the battlefield that aided him in victory than just sheer military genius. Napoleon famously said, “I’d rather have lucky generals than good ones.” This might be true of Lee. While a master of the battlefield, Lee found much luck too. Did he press his luck though? This article explores this question.

<https://emergingcivilwar.com/2021/03/31/lees-luck/>

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.rappvalleycivilwar.org. Yearly membership dues are \$35.00 for an individual, \$45.00 for families, and 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.

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