



**THE DRUM & BUGLE**  
**Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table**  
**June 2026, Volume 23, Issue 6**

**Speaker:** Aaron Siever  
**Topic:** "Battles of Cross Keys and Port Republic"  
**When:** June 8, 2026  
**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](http://www.rappvalleycivilwar.org)  
**Our Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/rvcwrt](http://www.facebook.com/rvcwrt)

\*\*\*

**Aaron Siever "Battles of Cross Keys and Port Republic"**

By the spring of 1862, things were not going well for the Confederacy. George McClellan's Union Army of the Potomac was on the peninsula in Virginia, a mere 75 miles away from Richmond. The Confederacy needed diversion and some success. General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson was the answer. In the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, Jackson's campaign to mystify, mislead, and surprise the enemy was exactly what the Confederacy needed. In 48 days, Jackson's men, given the sobriquet of "Jackson's Foot

Cavalry," would march nearly 650 miles, fight countless skirmishes, and defeat three Federal armies in 5 major battles. The last two of which were fought on June 8 and June 9 at Cross Keys and Port Republic, respectively. The dual victories were not without fault, and an incident on June 8, the same day as the Battle of Cross Keys, could have changed the course of events. However, the Confederate army was indeed successful, and the Shenandoah Valley was secure for the time being. The presentation will cover a brief overview of the Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1862, the action occurring on June 6<sup>th</sup> in Harrisonburg, the setup and Battle of Cross Keys, the narrow escape of "Stonewall" Jackson in the Town of Port Republic, the same day as the Cross Keys Battle, and finally the setup and Battle of Port Republic.

Aaron Siever grew up in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Since he was a child, he has been interested in the American Civil War. After graduating from high school in 2003, Aaron went into a law enforcement career that spanned 15 years. In 2004, Aaron started documenting the various Civil War sites he had visited and called this Aaron's Civil War Travels. As he traveled around, Aaron started making short videos of his travels in 2016. Aaron created his YouTube channel that same year (Aaron's Civil War Travels) and by 2024 Aaron has done over 100 videos at Civil War related sites from Virginia to California. In 2020, Aaron graduated from Liberty University with a bachelor's degree in history and criminal justice. Aaron also received a certificate in the American Civil War and Reconstruction from Columbia University online (Columbia X). In 2021, Aaron joined the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation where he was responsible for maintaining the Valley's Civil War battlefields, overseeing projects and conducting tours and talks as a Park Ranger.

\*\*\*

**“The 13<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Reserves – the ‘Bucktails’”  
by Greg Martz**

**A Review of the May 2026 Program by Greg Mertz**

Our scheduled speaker for our May meeting was to be Michael Hardy and his program on “Feeding Lee’s Army.” But Michael’s mother died just days before our meeting, so I substituted for him speaking on the most recent topic that I had given to the Civil War Round Table in Reading, Pennsylvania on the “Bucktails.”

Elizabeth Kane had a difficult delivery on the birth of her son and was still bedridden when six days later, on April 12, 1861, the Confederates fired upon Fort Sumter. The following day, her husband Thomas L. Kane announced that he must leave her side to take care of business in northern Pennsylvania. When she was eventually allowed to sit up and read a newspaper, she saw in print that her husband had joined the United States Army and had recruited a unit for the Civil War. His business was to go to Elk, McKeen and Cameron counties – primarily to the lumber camps – where he knew that he would find rugged outdoorsmen who had been around guns their entire life, to form a unique unit of marksmen.

When one of the recruits spotted a deer hide hanging at a butcher shop across from Kane's headquarters and cut off its tail to stick in his hat, Kane realized that he had the perfect name for his command – the "Bucktails." Before long, all the other men had obtained deer tails to wear in their caps as well.

Traveling on four rafts during part of their journey to Harrisburg, the state capital of Pennsylvania, the men learned that the state had already filled its quota for Lincoln's call for 75,000 men to put down the rebellion. However, Governor Andrew Curtin decided to retain the 14,000 extra men, enrolling them in the "Pennsylvania Reserves." The 315 men recruited by Kane and nearly 700 others became the "13<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Reserves." The marksmen were trained to specialize in skirmish duty, where soldiers were called upon to fire at individual enemy skirmishers rather than the easier target of a battleline of men standing shoulder to shoulder. By June of 1861, the Bucktails and some of the other Pennsylvania Reserves were called to duty outside of the state, assigned to patrol around Cumberland, Maryland.

While the state officially redesignated the 13<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Reserves as the 42<sup>nd</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry, all the Reserves rejected their new designations. The Bucktails also nearly revolted when they were issued smoothbore muskets instead of the promised rifles. But perhaps the most interesting unrest occurred between Lt. Col. Thomas Kane and Col. Charles Biddle. Kane was a radical abolitionist Republican who was anxious to defeat the Confederates, while Biddle was a peace Democrat, content to wait for the "war fever" among the Confederates to die down so peace could be negotiated – a peace that would not likely include the abolition of slavery.

When Kane came down with a fever and thought he was dying, he challenged Biddle to a duel. Historian Ryan Quint has suggested that Kane's belief that he did not have long to live may have emboldened him to make the challenge, and perhaps the opportunity to die a martyr for the cause of abolition.

Biddle was elected to Congress in the fall of 1861, and in December the Bucktails were sent to Dranesville, Virginia for what would be their first battle. While Kane was still recovering from his fever, he traveled to Dranesville to lead his men. George Cook had drawn guard duty on the day of the battle, but rather than miss out on the excitement, he paid one of his comrades to take his place so he could join in the fight. Cook was shot in the head and killed in one of the first volleys. Samuel Galbreath volunteered to be one of eight soldiers to tear down a fence that was obstructing the field of fire for the Bucktails, and was killed, leaving behind his wife, 9-year-old daughter and 8-year-old son. Kane was wounded in the face, and while recovering, his wife convinced him to drop the challenge of the duel with Biddle.

Both Federal troops in the Shenandoah Valley and on the Peninsula desired the services of the Bucktail sharpshooters, so the regiment was split into two battalions for the spring of 1862. The battalion in the Valley may have been responsible for killing Confederate cavalryman Gen. Turner Ashby in the battle of Harrisonburg. The battalion on the Peninsula was called upon to be the rearguard at Beaver Dam Creek or Mechanicsville, and lost heavily as they attempted to withdraw.

In the summer of 1862, the men received an upgrade in their weapons – Sharp's rifles -- that could fire 8-10 times per minute. Kane was promoted to brigadier general, leaving the Bucktails. Their new colonel, Hugh McNeil, would lead them into a skirmish with Confederates along a fence in Antietam's East Woods. Since the Sharp's rifles were breach loading and could easily be fired while laying down, the Bucktails dropped to the ground 75 yards from the Confederate line, yet continued to pepper the enemy. McNeil rose and ordered a charge, a bullet pierced his heart, and the enraged Bucktails cleared the fence.

Col. Charles Frederick Taylor became the next commander and the troops next fought at Fredericksburg. Gen. George G. Meade was stunned to find his marksmen being assigned to support Federal artillery, ordering Taylor

and his regiment to advance at the double-quick. The color bearer, John Looney, was killed, staining the flag with his blood, and the 13<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Reserves suffered their greatest loss in life during the war at Fredericksburg's Prospect Hill – 35 men were killed or mortally wounded.

Taylor would lead the men across Gettysburg's Valley of Death to a position along a stone wall on July 2, 1863. Noting that the troops on the Bucktail's left flank had hunkered down, Taylor went to them and inquired why they were not firing. When told that Confederates posted in the Devils Den had flanked their position, but they lacked the men to drive them out, the colonel announced that he would get reinforcements. When he rose to carry out his mission, he was shot dead, collapsing in the arms of one of his lieutenants.

Gettysburg was also the last battle of the war for Bucktail Angelo Crapsey. Neither furlough nor stays in a Philadelphia hospital helped his depression and he was discharged from the army. Less than a year later, he took his own life. Tim Talbott pointed out that his tragic ordeal is documented in the book "Pathway to Hell" by Dennis W. Brandt.

During the winter of 1863-64, the Bucktails were issued perhaps the best weapon available during the Civil War – the seven-shot Spencer Rifle – which could fire 15 to 20 shots per minute. They used these weapons in the battle of the Wilderness on May 4, 1864, to support the 5<sup>th</sup> New York Cavalry near Parker's Store. Confederates who had been told they would be facing only a few cavalrymen responded by complaining, "Cavalry h—l: cavalry don't carry knapsacks and wear bucktails."

On May 9, 1864, the Bucktails found themselves posted besides the other vaunted marksmen of the Army of the Potomac, Berdan's Sharpshooters. A squad of Berdan's men with heavy rifles with globe sights were firing at Confederates across the Po River from them, and had not been successful in striking their targets. One of the Bucktails' officers obtained permission for his men try their skill. The Bucktails dropped two Confederates and sent the others scurrying to cover. The unit mustered out at the end of May after admirably performing their unique skills.

\*\*\*

## **2026 Fredericksburg National Cemetery Luminaria**

If you are like my wife and I, Saturday of Memorial Day weekend has one thing penciled in every year, The Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park's annual National Cemetery Luminaria. As a teacher, I follow weather closely (snow days are a teacher's best friend). It was obvious that the luminaria was not going to happen. One of my students is a scout that participates in placing the baggies with the candles. She showed me the email from her scout leader about the cancelation. While many of us were upset about it not happening this year, it is not the only time. Please enjoy this video from 2020, when during the pandemic, the luminary did not happen, but John Hennessey was interviewed and spoke about the importance of this event.

[https://youtu.be/L\\_0-L\\_du-M8?si=RzSbwmAIF-Dm6UEw](https://youtu.be/L_0-L_du-M8?si=RzSbwmAIF-Dm6UEw)

\*\*\*

## **Important Information about the Park's Buildings**

At this time, both Chatham Manor and the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Centers remain closed. The grounds are open, with park staff manning the bookstore in Fredericksburg, and offering talks at Chatham. Recent information looks like Chatham will reopen at some time in July, with the visitor center being later in the summer. We will keep you updated as information come into us. Chancellorsville is open, and Elwood will be opening up for the season in May.

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](https://www.nps.gov/frsp-tours). Park staff look forward to welcoming visitors to our upgraded facilities in spring and summer 2026!

\*\*\*

## **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.

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](mailto:executivedirector@cvbt.org) .  
Office: 540-374-0900

\*\*\*

## **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.cwrftf.org](http://www.cwrftf.org), and will be updated here. Below is the schedule starting in September 2025 and going to June 2026.

May 27, 2026

### **The Appomattox Campaign**

Speaker: Hampton Newsome

June 17, 2026

### **Teacher, Preacher, Soldier, Spy: John R. Kelso**

Speaker: Christopher Grasso

\*\*\*

## **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](http://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

\*\*\*

## **The RVCWRT Executive Committee**

**President:** Charlie Seifert

**Vice President:** Paul Stier

**Treasurer:** Jay Oakley

**Secretary:** Melanie Jordan

**Members at Large:** John Sapanara, Rick Horner, Greg Mertz, Dennis Olsen, Peter Rasmussen, Jon Burrell