



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
October 2021, Volume 18, Issue 10

Speaker: Brian Withrow
Topic: U.S. Grant (1st Person)
When: Monday October 11, 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

Please make dinner reservations through John Sapanara via email rappcwevents21@gmail.com or by phone 540-479-1299. He will contact you with confirmation. Please reserve by the Thursday before the Monday dinner meeting date. If you wish to be placed on the "permanent reservation" list, please advise John. Members on this list do not need to make reservations every month - their attendance is assumed unless they cancel beforehand. Member dinner price is **\$30**. This price also applies to non-member attendees who join at the meeting, or to guests invited by members. 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

“Brian Withrow: U.S. Grant (1st Person)”

For our guest speaker, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, today’s calendar reads October 11, 1865. Only six months have passed since the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House. He makes a rare public speaking appearance for you. As staff officers, colleagues and friends of the General can attest, he is uncomfortable speaking in large social or public gatherings and is typically a man of few words in those settings. However, when learning of the purpose and composition of our gathering, he agreed to be here in admiration for the contributions made by civilian citizens to winning the war. So without further ado, I present to you Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, United States Army General-in-Chief.

“The War for the Common Soldier”

by Peter Carmichael

A Review of the September 2021 Program by Greg Mertz

Our speaker, Peter Carmichael, reminisced about working as a seasonal historian at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park while still a college student. When conducting guided walking tours for park visitors, Carmichael found the Sunken Road on the Fredericksburg battlefield to be a place where he could raise what he described as “the big questions” including why the soldiers fought. What compelled Union soldiers to advance across the open ground in front of the Confederate held stone wall and Marye’s Heights? How did Union soldiers make an attack with virtually no chance of success?

In Carmichael’s academic career, he continued to ask big questions and pursue studies on the motivation of soldiers. He was inspired by What They

Fought For and Cause and Comrades, both by Dr. James McPherson. While those books had a significant influence on Carmichael, ironically, they likewise left him unsatisfied. Carmichael's book, The War for the Common Soldier, does not "refute" McPherson's works, but rather feels that he has built upon McPherson's endeavors.

McPherson made the point that ideas mattered to Civil War soldiers and showed that the troops were deeply political. McPherson went beyond the earlier studies focusing on the abstract concepts of honor or duty as incentives for soldiers. But Carmichael felt that there was not a straight line between the ideas and the politics with soldier behavior. Their world was more complex than that, and Carmichael demonstrated that circumstances mattered a great deal. In his research, Carmichael found that a soldier's understanding of the war changed over time as circumstances and conditions changed.

Carmichael found an example of a soldier whose attitude toward the war and his service as a soldier changed during the war in the book, No Freedom Shrieker: The Civil War Letters of Union Soldier Charles Freeman Biddlecom, 147th Regiment, New York State Volunteer Army. The man whom Biddlecom was when he first joined the Union army, when compared to the man he had eventually evolved into, was "truly, truly an amazing transformation" declared Carmichael.

Biddlecom enlisted in 1861, but returned home to recuperate from an illness, where he discovered that his family was critical of him and viewed him as a failure. In the fall of 1863, he accepted a bounty to rejoin the army, but after one freezing night of sleeping with just a blanket while enroute to the front, he wrote to his wife that he needed to find a way to get out of the army. Arriving with the army in Culpeper and service among the veterans did not improve his outlook, and he wrote "Cursed be the day that I saw my name drawn as a conscript.... I think sometimes that if it was not for you and my children I would blow out my brains."

By the spring of 1864, he was tempted by some comrades called the "Blue Ridge Brigade," who had encouraged Biddlecom to desert with them, heading for the Blue Ridge mountains before the spring campaign got underway. But despite Biddlecom's disenchantment with the war effort, he surprisingly stayed. When the 1864 Overland Campaign ended, he proudly

wrote of his desire to keep his worn-out coat as a souvenir, as well as expressed the view that “home with its little cares and troubles is not the worst place in the world for a man to enjoy life.”

Carmichael stressed that in order to understand a battle, it is not enough to simply cover troop movements; students of the war need to understand the soldier’s relationship with their home front. Rather than try to shield their families from their hardships and their negative thoughts, soldiers were incredibly open in their writings and were very forthright when writing to their wives in particular.

In a world in which people placed their fate in the hands of Providence, the soldiers looked to see who was killed and who lived in the aftermath of battle. They often found that the religious men who did their duty were those who fell, while the immoral ones and cowards survived. Carmichael concluded, “This is a massive disruption to how they [understood] how the world works.”

Carmichael noted that Civil War soldiers have often been described as being either “brave or cowardly” or as being either “dutiful or rebellious.” He concluded that rather being one or the other, a soldier can be all of those things over the course of their experience. Perhaps the best way to describe a soldier’s understanding of his place in the war is “conflicted.” “Circumstances and conditions” dictated where a soldier stood on the spectrum of any soldier attribute at any given moment. They were pragmatists, adapting according to what was needed in order to survive.

Alexander Keever [sic?], a North Carolina soldier, joined the Confederate army at Petersburg in the fall of 1864. While he was tempted to desert and go home, he knew that an attempt would be made to track him down, and that he risked being executed. He wrote to his wife of need for her to be cheerful and put her trust in God. “If it is his will, then I will get to come home and see you all one more time” he wrote, “and if it is his will for me to die here, it is all right with me.”

But, in the spring of 1865, he witnessed Confederate deserters running over to Union lines, and also noted that when Confederates on the picket line fired upon the deserters, that they always seemed to miss their mark. The chances of safely reaching enemy lines were exceeding high. So, within ten days of writing to his wife about putting the situation in God’s hands, Keever crossed the no-man’s land into Union lines.

Letters from the Storm: The Intimate Civil War Letters of Lt. J.A.H. Foster, 155th Pennsylvania Volunteers chronicle a soldier who was wounded on Gettysburg's Little Round Top, and anticipated being promoted to captain upon his return after his recovery. Not only was he not promoted, but because his wound left him with some level of incapacitation, he was criticized by his captain for not being able to keep up on the march. He fought in Saunders Field in the battle of the Wilderness, where his name tag was found prior to the land becoming part of the national park.

But after the battle, Foster, along with some other officers, slipped away to Fredericksburg (without permission), and made their way to Washington, where they checked into a boarding house. While there, he read in the newspapers of how his regiment was heavily engaged at Spotsylvania. Foster's sense of duty was impacted by the fact that he was a proven combat veteran. He loved the Union, was disgusted by the Copperhead movement, yet still his sense of duty changed as his circumstance changed. Foster decided to rejoin his unit after the battle of North Anna, reporting that upon his return he had never seen his captain angrier, while surprisingly Foster did not understand the reason why.

The letters of Oliver Wendell Holmes, of the 20th Massachusetts, are some of the best at expressing how a soldier's attitudes changed in accord with the changes in circumstances. In December, 1864, the veteran Holmes resolved, "I started in this thing a boy[.] I am now a man and I have been coming to the conclusion for the last six months that my duty has changed . . . and now I honestly think the duty of fighting has ceased for me -- ceased because I have laboriously and with much suffering of mind and body earned the right . . . to decide for myself how I can best do my duty"

From the RVCWRT Archives: A Classic Presentation by John Hennessy

John Hennessy recently retired from the National Park Service after many years as Chief Historian of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. He was a frequent lecturer at RVCWRT dinner meetings. The presentation reviewed below is a memorable classic from 2011, contrasting history and memory. The piece was written by Greg Mertz, Hennessy's long-time colleague at the park.

“Using and Abusing Hallowed Ground: The Evolution of Interpretation of Civil War Battlefields”

By John Hennessy

A Review of the March 2011 Program by Greg Mertz

"Are we historians or are we memorialists?" John Hennessy, Chief of Interpretation at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park began his presentation with this question. Referring to the role of National Park Service interpreters in how they share the Civil War with the visiting public. Do we expect our Park Rangers donning their Stetsons to give the academic perspectives of what happened during the Civil War and why? Do we want them to preserve the memory of the Civil War veterans who helped to establish the parks and to continue to tell the stories that they have passed down to us? Hennessy spent the bulk of his program examining the various nuances of this question, and he ended by providing his perception of the proper way to address the challenge.

In pointing out the differences, Hennessy jumped right into the single most prominent issue being addressed by both the historian and the memorialist – slavery. It is nearly impossible to find a “historian” who does not link the Civil War to the issue of slavery, yet why is it that the mere mention of slavery bothers many who care deeply about the study and understanding of the Civil War? Hennessy then asked why, on the other hand, there are objections to such things as statues of “Stonewall” Jackson, the naming of a school after Robert E. Lee, or the display in public of the Confederate battle flag. Those who espouse that the war should be remembered in a particular way are the would be “memorialists.”

While a “memorialist” looks at history in a distinct manner, there are many different groups of memorialists who look at history through different lenses and advocate different issues as being noteworthy. These various types of memorialists often take offense at the presentation of a view contrary to their own, and often see virtue in only one side of the controversy. Views of memorialists are held so dearly, that they have moved beyond history and have become firmly embedded into their culture and core values. While history can be debated, Hennessy pointed out that one cannot argue culture. Hennessy then delved into some of the specific memorialists constituent groups which have had a particularly strong influence in the understanding and interpretation of the Civil War.

Arguably the most prominent memorialist point of view is that of the Lost Cause, a term coined by Edward A. Pollard in his 1866 book on the Southern perspective of the Civil War. The Lost Cause has several tenets. The Confederacy was led by virtuous men. The Confederacy lost because it was overwhelmed by superior Northern manpower and resources. Southerners were the ones fighting in defense of liberty and the ideals of the Constitution; and that Lincoln betrayed the American ideologies. The idea of States Rights was the cause for which the Confederacy went to war. Slavery, the Lost Cause tenets proclaimed, was benign and was not the cause of the war, and all of the bloodshed for emancipation was unnecessary.

The Lost Cause has resonated with so many Americans, in both the North as well as in the South, predominantly because some of its tenets are true. The Confederacy did have virtuous leaders, including men like Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson. The South did in fact have less industry, less manufacturing and a much smaller population to draw upon. The rights of the states relative to the powers granted to the federal government have indeed long been an issue from the adoption of the Constitution in 1787 to this very day. Much of what Lost Cause memorialists advocate is based upon factors that are not in dispute.

The other key reason why the Lost Cause has been sustained is the spirit of reconciliation. As time passed following the war, and with the centennial of the nation coming eleven years after the end of the Civil War, the veterans of opposing sides began to converse. The veterans of the Blue and Gray were anxious to put back together a country that had been torn apart by the Civil War. The best way to heal the nation was to dwell on what the Union and Confederate soldier had in common, and to set aside their differences. The soldiers on both sides shared suffering and sacrifices. Men on both sides fought bravely for what they thought was right. These former enemies could build a consensus on their shared common experiences.

As the veterans met and attended reunions together, and participated in ceremonies together, they also preserved and interpreted battlefields together. Their focus in interpreting battlefields was on the maneuvers, the positions, the tactics – things which for the most part, they agreed upon. Today, we often see the Civil War through the lens of the manner in which the Civil War veterans have presented it to us via the battlefields that they preserved. Seeing the war in this way is not without its consequences. However, in their efforts of reconciliation and focusing upon what the men on

both sides agreed upon, their interpretations of the battlefields did not include context. Absent is any discussion on the causes of the war, absent is emancipation as a result of the war, absent is the ugliness of reconstruction, and absent is the issue of race and slavery. This quest for reconciliation and the efforts of the veterans to be “memorialists” has been the foundation for shaping the interpretation of Civil War battlefields, argued Hennessy, rather than the practice of the “historian.”

When Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park was founded, the legislation drafted by Congress instructed park officials to preserve the remains of the battlefields. It included no mention of the history; no hint of how to interpret it. Park staff perpetuated the reconciliatory atmosphere created by the Civil War veterans. Interpretation continued to provide details on the battles. The Lost Cause theme and emphasis on the Southern perspective was prominent. The Fredericksburg battlefield unit consisted of the Confederate line rather than the ground over which the Federal forces attacked. The Chancellorsville battlefield focused on Lee and Jackson, with a visitor contact station and subsequent visitor center at the site of Jackson’s wounding. The Battles of the Wilderness and Spotsylvania Court House, which were Federal strategic victories, were provided considerably less prominence.

The First Manassas battlefield was established as the result of the purchase of 130 acres of Henry Hill by the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Their goal was to create the most beautiful memorial park to the Confederacy in the world. While the SCV was successful in raising \$50,000 to buy the land, it could not raise enough money to provide the \$30 per month necessary to maintain and operate the park, so it turned the park over to the National Park Service. In donating the ground to the federal government, the SCV had three conditions: A museum would be built, a monument to Jackson would be permitted, and the park could not “detract from the glory due Confederate heroes.”

The purely military interpretation at Civil War parks drew criticism for lacking context. At first officials defended their practices. “Death admits of no argument and pain is another certain result,” responded one official, “There is no room for disputable detail.” By 1940 a National Park official complained that interpretation catered to the specialist rather than layman, and in 1952 historian Alan Nevins observed that visitors had little understanding of why the battles mattered. The centennial of the Civil War coincided with the Civil

Rights movement, so while some questioned the true legacy of the Civil War, others intensified the reconciliatory message along with the Lost Cause assessment of slavery. In 2000 Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr. inserted language into an appropriation bill that directed Civil War national parks to interpret the unique role of slavery in the causes of the war. It was clearly a direct effort to counter the prominent reconciliatory and Lost Cause interpretation that he saw was so prominent in Civil War interpretation. When Manassas installed a new interpretive panel addressing slavery, the SVC threatened to seek the return of their donation of Henry Hill, citing the condition that the park could not undermine the honor of Confederates.

Hennessey recently presented a tour on slavery in Fredericksburg for a group made up from three area black churches and was asked if he would get in trouble for doing so. At least a segment of the African-American community has the impression that the park is bound by the Lost Cause interpretation that is so prevalent. Efforts of the parks to tell diverse points of view as well as to present good, accurate history have resulted in Confederate heritage groups accusing the National Park Service of portraying one side as the villain and presenting the war as a conflict between good and evil.

What is the answer to the question that was the central theme of the talk? Are National Park Service Civil War interpreters, historians or memorialists? Hennessey thinks they should be both. They have inherited the task of telling the story that the veterans who were prominent in creating our battlefield parks have handed down to our park service staffs and we must respect that tradition. Yet, our park interpreters also have a duty to make the parks relevant to the masses of people who have no interest in American history; we need to address the war's meaning and its significance to be able to reach those audiences.

CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF FREDERICKSBURG SCHEDULE

Civil War Round Table of Fredericksburg holds monthly meetings (usually the fourth Wednesday) at the Jepson Alumni Center at University of Mary Washington. Further details are available on their website at www.cwrta.org. Here is their schedule for the next three months:

October 27 - Old Alleghany: The Life and Wars of General Edward Johnson, Greg Clemmer

November 17 - The Generalship of Lee and Grant in the Overland Campaign,
Gordon Rhea

300th Anniversary of Spotsylvania County

We hope many of you were able to attend the festivities celebrating the 300th Anniversary of Spotsylvania County. Below you will find a link to a YouTube video from crrlvideo. The video is with Terry Dougherty, curator of the Spotsylvania County Museum. The video is primarily focused on the founding, as well as the trials and tribulations of the early settlers in this area. I hope you all enjoy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBm3PTqCiPA>

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 \$35 for individuals and \$45 for families. Membership is open to anyone interested in the military, political and social history of the American Civil War.

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