



ON THE skirmish line

Newsletter of The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust

CVBT WELCOMES ITS 21ST YEAR AT 20TH ANNUAL MEETING



Bob Jones received the Michael P. Stevens Award on behalf of the RVCWRT.

During the last weekend of April, the CVBT celebrated 20 years of hard work to preserve battlefield land. There were three days of tours and a business meeting/banquet to present awards, review finances, vote people on to the Board of Directors, and thank our membership for their support. As Trust president Tom Van Winkle said: "We are successful because of the partnership we have with you, our team members, who actively support the mission."



CVBT President Tom Van Winkle addresses the membership at the Annual Meeting.

It was our great pleasure to also present the first ever Dr. Michael P. Stevens Preservation Award. That recognition is directly from the CVBT Board of Directors, *not* member donations, and its purpose is to shine a light on those who have made notable contributions to the preservation of Civil War resources in Virginia, through management and protection, as well as by acquisition of sites. This year's award went to the Rappahannock Valley Civil

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War Round Table, which has developed and maintained a well-respected education program that conveys to the community the importance of our heritage. Further, from the very beginning, the RVCWRT has raised significant amounts of cash to support the CVBT mission to acquire and preserve land. We were thrilled to be able to recognize that partnership in a tangible way.

When we informed the RVCWRT that we would be presenting them with this award, which includes \$1,000 in cash to further their mission, they responded with an alternative idea. Instead of the cash, they asked for tickets to the 2017 Annual

Meeting, which they then auctioned off, to raise even more money for preservation. What an absolutely wonderful group they are. It is our great privilege, and also a bit humbling, to be associated with folks like that.

During the course of the business meeting, the following individuals were voted on to the CVBT Board of Directors:

James M. Pates, Founding Member
Charles G. McDaniel, Second term
Edward J. Gillis, First term
Paul T. Scott, First term

There is much work to do and these individuals are part of the team that will help do it.

❖ IN MEMORIAM ❖

It is with sadness that we note the passing of two long-time CVBT members—**Fenton “Jerry” Kephart**, of Charlottesville, Virginia and **Lee Sherrill**, from North Carolina. They were stalwart members of our organization and it was our great privilege to get to know them over the years. Both were strong supporters of battlefield preservation and both of their families asked that CVBT be the beneficiary of donations in their memory. The response from those who knew these two men has been exceptionally generous, cumulatively measured in thousands of dollars.

We also wish to remember **John P. Ackerly, III**. Jack participated in our organizing meeting back in 1996, when we still did not know what to call ourselves. He had been legal advisor to the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites (APCWS) and shared his experience by also providing critically important guidance to our group as we went through the incorporation process. His friend Bob Krick wrote the following for an obituary that appeared in our local press:

Having walked across every battlefield in Virginia with Jack, I can attest that he most loved McDowell and its mountains, where he also hunted. The groundhogs of Highland County

surely are the only creatures in the Commonwealth who will not mourn Jack's untimely demise.

In 2013, the CVBT awarded Jack its Ralph Happel Award. At his passing, the Lee-Jackson Education Association, with which he was closely associated, has donated \$5,000 to the CVBT in his name. A long-time preservation colleague has donated another \$5,000 to his memory. We are proud to have known them all, and proud that they knew us. These donations will go toward dirt and grass.

A New Book Looks Closely at Battlefield Preservation

Bob Zeller has written a history of the battlefield preservation movement that began in Fredericksburg 30 years ago. It is called *Fighting the Second Civil War: A History of Battlefield Preservation and the Emergence of the Civil War Trust*, and is a close look at how a modern non-profit organization has aggressively and quite effectively preserved huge amounts of battlefield acreage. There is sometimes a tendency in the non-profit world to gloss over differences of opinion and to minimize mistakes, but Zeller's book is refreshing in its candor. It is an excellent read.



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An Unfinished Railway Coursed Through Three Battlefields

During the Civil War, an unfinished railway became a significant part of three campaigns fought in and around Fredericksburg. This graded, linear route became part of the battlefield landscape on December 13, 1862 (battle of Fredericksburg), on May 1–4, 1863 (Chancellorsville and second battle of Fredericksburg), and on May 6, 1864 (battle of the Wilderness). Its continued presence on the land today helps us to pinpoint where certain events occurred, on battlegrounds that have sometimes changed substantially over the past century and a half.

In 1853, a group of investors incorporated a railroad company and began to establish a route from Fredericksburg to Orange Court House. By the time of the Civil War, the Fredericksburg & Gordonsville Railroad Company had graded 18 miles of the right-of-way, but had not yet laid any track. The result was a level way, with solidly built culverts, that allowed large bodies of troops to move rapidly across otherwise rough ground. Tracks were laid after the war and trains ran for a few decades, but the enterprise has since been abandoned and the tracks and ties removed. As a consequence, the route looks much as it did when it was labeled on Civil War maps as “unfinished.”

On December 13, 1862, the battle of Fredericksburg was fought in two separate engagements, both of them exceptionally intense. At that time, the Union army was commanded by Major General Ambrose Burnside and the Confederate army commanded by General Robert E. Lee. Several miles south of town, a Federal force attacked the Confederate defenses along a low set of hills (across the Slaughter Pen farm, as our members are well aware). A railway ran through that sector, but it was an active line that ran to Richmond, not the unfinished railway that was reaching to the west.

North of this battleground, in Fredericksburg, the Union army made a series of attacks against a formidable Confederate position on Marye’s Heights. The Southerners had artillery on the hilltop and infantry sheltered in a sunken road, behind a stone wall. One of the many Federal assaults occurred in the late afternoon, when Brigadier General George W. Getty advanced



While some parts of the unfinished railway have become roads and driveways, many other sections remain as intact as the day they were trod by Civil War infantry.

his division over the terrain that included a railway cut. While one of his brigades remained in reserve, sheltered by the cut, the other pushed on toward the sunken road. The attacking troops received the full force of Confederate infantry fire and fell back. The reserve troops in the cut were protected from that small arms fire, but unknowingly lay exposed to Confederate artillery on a hill known today as Lee’s Hill. Confederate cannons fired down this cut, as if it were a bowling alley, and decimated the Federals waiting in reserve there.

Following the Fredericksburg disaster and an ill-fated Mud March, President Abraham Lincoln relieved Burnside of army command and appointed Major General Joseph Hooker to that position. This new commander tightened up the army’s administration and set out

to improve its fighting capabilities. On April 27, 1863, Hooker launched three corps upriver from Fredericksburg, on a wide swing to cross both the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers. This route brought them to the same side of the Rappahannock River as Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia.

The battle of Chancellorsville opened on May 1, 1863 along the Orange Turnpike (modern State Route 3). As fighting saw-sawed back and forth across rolling farmland, another Federal column approached along a parallel route to the south, called the Orange Plank Road. There was yet another route to the south of this plank road not known to the Federals, but familiar to the Confederates.

As the Union forces advanced on the main roads to Fredericksburg, Confederate General Stonewall Jackson directed General A.R. “Rans” Wright’s Georgia brigade to use the unfinished railway to push east, to effectively get on to the flank and rear of the Federal troops advancing on the Orange Plank Road. With an unknown force threatening his forward movement, Hooker ordered his advancing columns back. Despite his growing strength as units closed up on Chancellorsville, the Federal commander hesitated to force the issue. Jackson’s aggressive response had caused Hooker to recall his offensive probes, including a third column moving along River Road, to uncover Bank’s Ford

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Early Preservation in the Wilderness

★ BY ROBERT K. KRICK ★

PRESERVING A BATTLEGROUND IS A LENGTHY GRIND, CONSISTING OF LONG PERIODS OF CONTACT AND DISCUSSION, PUNCTUATED EVERY NOW AND THEN BY AN ACTUAL LAND TRANSFER. ED ZELLER'S NEW BOOK ABOUT THE CIVIL WAR TRUST TELLS A GREAT STORY ABOUT BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION THAT BEGAN IN 1987, BUT THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH IMPORTANT GROUND HAS BEEN ACQUIRED AND PROTECTED IS CONSIDERABLY BROADER. THIS SUMMARY OF EARLY PRESERVATION EFFORTS AT THE WIDOW TAPP FIELD IS FROM A MEMOIR THAT BOB KRICK IS WRITING ABOUT HIS DECADES OF WORK ON THE LOCAL BATTLEFIELDS.



Saving the Widow Tapp Field

The Tapp Field might well not have survived as an historic site, but for the admirable public-spirited largesse of Allen M. Giddings, a medical doctor from Michigan. Douglas Southall Freeman had attempted to buy the site from Phenie Tapp during the 1930s with his own money, to protect it—as he did, with help from like-minded friends, at several Civil War landmarks around Richmond. He found Phenie old, rambling, unsophisticated, and hard to deal with; she was the antithesis of a clear-title landowner. Branch Spalding, the excellent park superintendent at the time, corresponded steadily with Freeman from 1935 into the early 1940's. Freeman held options on a large Tapp tract (58 acres at one point) at least twice.

Spalding's correspondence reminded Freeman of Phenie's considerable eccentricity. A February 17, 1940, letter for instance worried that if asked for an extension on an option, "she would immediately become suspicious, and the whole appletart would be upset." A debt-induced judgment against Phenie further complicated matters, and then she suddenly sold some property to a neighbor.

Doctor Giddings overcame those problems after Phenie's death. He bought two tracts (of two and 12.3 acres), then sold them to the park soon after I arrived in 1972, and went to work on lands issues. The smaller tract, just across the Plank Road opposite the monuments, closed in October 1974; it had had an old two-story schoolhouse on it when Giddings acquired it in 1960. Giddings' generosity deserves to be remembered.

The markers at the southeastern edge of the Tapp Field include two obvious ones and another that is obscure indeed. James Power Smith's elegantly simple small granite monument, one of ten he erected in 1903 all around the battlefields, is well documented. The large, formal monument of polished red granite, dedicated during the Centennial, is close cousin to the others in the same format at Sharpsburg and elsewhere. Harold B. Simpson's book *Red Granite for Gray Heroes* (1969), done in concert with a Texas politician, describes that series of Texas memorials.

The other marker is a large, plain field stone, without any

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markings at all on it. Impressive legend credits J. Horace Lacy of Ellwood (and Chatham, of course) with planting it there, between his alleged other Tapp excursions for romantic reasons, to mark the end of the famous charge and the vicinity of the mass grave of Texan dead. Tom Harrison (long-time Gettysburg historian) told me he had seen an early photograph with the stone standing upright, but could never resurrect that print

despite my promptings. For a bit more on the Lacy stone, see my chapter about the Tapp Field in Gallagher, ed., *The Wilderness Campaign* (University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

A key element in envisioning the Lee-to-the-Rear, and interpreting the event to visitors on the site (so long as that is allowed by the p.c. panjandrums), always will be the Harry A. McArdle painting done in the 1880s, flat black-and-white though the image became when fire destroyed the original.

An Unfinished Railway Coursed Through Three Battlefields, continued from page 3)

and thereby shorten the Union army's lines of communications.

Lee's continued control of Bank's Ford, facilitated by the Georgia brigade's action on the unfinished railway, kept the Union army's lines of communication cumbersome and ensured that the main force at Chancellorsville would remain widely separated from the Federal force at Fredericksburg. On May 2, Lee and Jackson decided to split their forces and execute an extended march to get a force into a position where the Union army appeared to have neglected its flank security. During that nerve-wracking march, a Federal force pushed forward to interrupt the Southern column and a sharp action occurred near an iron furnace. The Confederate rear guard used the unfinished railway in that sector as a protective trench.

In the late afternoon of May 2, the Confederate flanking force burst out of the woods and devastated two Union corps. Stonewall Jackson rode into a volley of friendly fire that evening, but the attack resumed the next day. After severe fighting, the Southern forces closed in on Chancellorsville, pushing the Federals back into a defensive position. That same day in Fredericksburg, the Union Sixth Corps attacked where the Union assaults in December had failed miserably. This Federal force had crossed the river downstream of that town on April 29, as a diversion, and was now being ordered to do much more.

The unfinished railway again played a role in the action. Near the sunken road, it was still exposed to artillery fire from Lee's Hill, but a coordinated series of Federal attacks along the Confederate line minimized the opportunity for the assault troops to be caught in the cut and slaughtered. Instead, a railway embankment near Hazel Run gave cover to several attacking regiments that used its defilade to get behind Marye's Heights and help in taking that high ground.

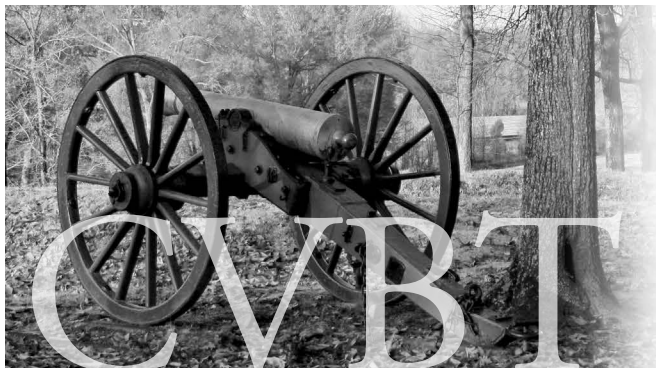
As the Sixth Corps broke out of Fredericksburg, Hooker was more than willing to remain in his defensive works. Lee subsequently took a calculated risk and detached several brigades to move east and counter Sedgwick's advance. Effectively halted at Salem Church, the Union forces fell back and established a defensive position closer to Fredericksburg. The Union advance to Salem Church had finally uncovered Bank's Ford, though, and Union engineers rapidly laid down pontoon bridges to open a line of communications.

The next day, May 4, Lee determined to crush Sedgwick's isolated corps since Hooker still gave no indication he would leave his defensive position. The Sixth Corps straddled the Plank Road (modern Route 3), so the Confederates used the unfinished railway, to the south, to maneuver formations into place for an assault. The troops were already fatigued from several days of marching and fighting and it took time to get them into position. Once again, an attacking Confederate force was not ready to jump off until late afternoon.

The part of the railway where Confederates formed for the attack on May 4, 1863 is owned and protected by the City of Fredericksburg. From west to east, the following units were deployed there: General E.A. Posey's Florida brigade, General Carnot Posey's Mississippi brigade, General A.R. Wright's Georgians (which had used the unfinished railway farther west, during the action on May 1), and Robert F. Hoke's North Carolina brigade. Finally, Confederate artillery fired three rounds in quick succession and the Southern forces boiled up out the bottomlands. They scrambled up the slope and slammed into the Union lines. The fighting was intense on the uplands and the Union forces were eventually pushed back. During the night of May 4/5, they retreated across their bridges at Bank's Ford.

The following spring, during the battle of the Wilderness, the unfinished railway would be used one more time for tactical advantage. On May 6, 1864, Union forces had nearly overwhelmed the Confederates near the Widow Tapp farm, but newly arrived forces under General James Longstreet turned the tide of battle. To maintain their momentum, Longstreet directed one of his staff officers to lead a force along the unfinished railway to a point where it could effectively threaten the Union flank. This attack through the woods proved effective, but Longstreet was wounded by friendly fire and the assault lost momentum. At the end of the day, the Union line held and the battle in the Wilderness ended. That night, both armies pulled out of the line and moved south, to Spotsylvania Court House.

The unfinished railway is a thin linear resource that is no longer in anyone's single ownership. Several sections are protected as part of local parks, but much of it remains vulnerable to being obliterated. In wooded areas like Chancellorsville and the Wilderness, it is an important battlefield landmark. *SZ*



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The mission of the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust is to preserve land associated with the four major campaigns of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House.

For information on membership, please write to the Trust at P.O. Box 3417, Fredericksburg, VA 22402; call our office at (540) 374-0900; or visit our website at www.cvbt.org. Contributions to the CVBT are tax-deductible.

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