

On The Skirmish Line

The Newsletter of the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust

Members Respond to Chancellorsville Appeal

As reported in our last newsletter, the CVBT has acquired another 16.37 acres of the old Talley Farm. This brings our total holdings on that part of the Chancellorsville battlefield to just over 45 acres. If we include the five acre tract on the north side of the Orange Turnpike (which we have already sold to the National Park Service) then the acreage we have managed to preserve in the Jackson flank attack area comes to 50 acres. Our members should be justifiably proud of this accomplishment.

As always, though, we must now pay for this new acreage. The price of the ground is \$200,000. Through the generous response of our members, we have already been able to raise just over \$26,000. We are also working with the Civil War Preservation Trust to convince the Commonwealth of Virginia to direct some of its transportation enhancement funds

to the acquisition of this site. Preservation of historic terrain along historic roadways is certainly an eligible use of such funds, but the State has not yet authorized this expense. As a consequence, we continue to appeal to our members to help us pay off this note. If the state grant comes through, we will divert any funds in excess of the purchase price to another purchase on the Chancellorsville battlefield. It is still about dirt and grass.

We are exceedingly grateful to our members who continue to step forward with generous donations, to help us purchase key battlefield terrain. There are additional, very exciting projects in the works and we will notify you as soon as they become a reality. In the meantime, we need to press on to pay off this current project so we can keep moving on.

2004 Annual Meeting

During the weekend of May 1, 2004, the CVBT held its Eighth Annual Meeting at the Holiday Inn Select, in Fredericksburg. This year's theme was: "No Turning Back: A Study of the Wilderness Campaign."

On Saturday morning, we took a group of hardy souls to the site of General James Longstreet's

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Mr. Robert Mrazek, former New York Congressman, accepts the first annual Ralph Happel Award for Battlefield Preservation.

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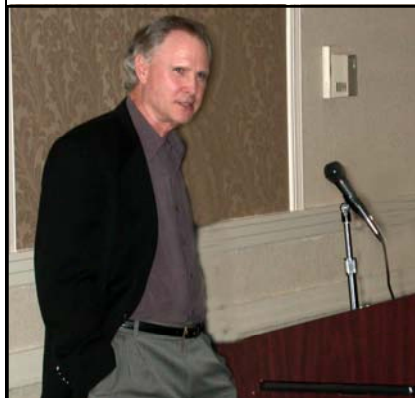
CVBT Staff

Donna G. Leahy
Executive Director

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flank attack, made on May 6, 1863. This tour included visits to several sites - some of them well known and others a bit obscure. The first stop was the unfinished railroad, near Parker's Store, which was the area where Longstreet's Corps turned east, toward the sound of guns, after a hurried night march from around Gordonsville. The second stop, at the Widow Tapp Farm, reviewed the arrival of Longstreet's Corps on the battlefield and the dramatic "Lee to the rear" episode. Finally we mustered along the railroad cut where Confederate troops deployed for their attack and followed the axis of their advance (using a compass to keep headed in the right direction) to the Orange Plank Road, where Longstreet had been wounded. This wooded ground has been acquired by the National Park Service in just the past few years and it was our pleasure and privilege to share this experience with some of our members.

In the afternoon, we hosted a seminar on the Wilderness. Featured speakers included Gordon Rhea, who has become one of the foremost scholars of the Overland Campaign. His solidly researched books on the war in Virginia in 1864 have become classics of Civil War literature. The second speaker was Brooks Simpson, a leading scholar on Ulysses S. Grant and Union leadership in general. His work has also



Mr. Gordon Rhea, award-winning author, addresses the CVBT Annual Meeting as the featured dinner speaker.



Instrumental in the founding of CVBT, **Jim Pates** accepts a gift from the Board as his latest term comes to an end.

been exhaustive and tremendously important to understanding this conflict and its aftermath. Finally, John Hennessy, Chief Historian of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, discussed his considerable research into the war's impacts on the civilian population. This trio shared their knowledge and insight of the Wilderness Campaign with an interested group of CVBT members and the afternoon passed

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A Tense Night at Ford Hood

In addition to the well known battlefields around Fredericksburg, there are numerous Civil War related features in more obscure areas. One of these sites is an earthwork called Fort Hood that commands a stretch of the Rappahannock River, downstream from the town.

During the days immediately preceding the Battle of Fredericksburg, Fort Hood was occupied by members of the 9th Georgia Infantry. On December 11, Captain George Hillyer commanded the contingent of Georgians stationed along the river. His account of a tense night along the picket line in Fort Hood, while Union troops pushed across the river, was later published in the Athens *Southern Banner*:

Near Fredericksburg, Dec. 18, '62

. . . I was at night-fall again sent out with a picket consisting of my own company and ten men of company E, to hold Fort Hood, a fortification on the Southern bank of the river four miles below Fredericksburg. About ten o'clock Major Jones visited the Fort and informed me that the Generals desired me to know that the enemy were at that moment crossing heavy columns of infantry at the mouth of "Deep Run," two miles above me, and were filing down the river. I had my pickets posted so as to watch both banks of the river for [a] half mile above the fort, and carefully arranging the order of my retreat, and keeping my line of pickets well in hand, I waited the result, taking my station at the uppermost point where my men were posted. About 11 o'clock I went down to the right for the purpose of giving some instructions to Lt. Dyer, in command of the fort, near which is an old Ferry, where Gen. Hood thought it likely the enemy would endeavor to throw over another bridge during the night. As I arrived at the fort I heard heavy firing at the post I had just left. Sending Jack Giles who was with me into the fort with an order to Lt. Dyer I hurried back up the river to the post where the firing was going on. The men (those of Co. E.) reported that a scouting party had attempted to come over in a bateau, and they had fired on them and driven them back. But as it was quite dark and the river being thinly frozen over in the middle and thickly at the banks, and the tide rising, made a great popping and cracking noise, I was of the opinion and am yet, that they were mistaken, and fired at nothing. I accordingly ordered them to cease firing. After this, all was quiet for the remainder of the night. Next morning about 9 o'clock I was astonished to hear from a scout who came out in search of me, that two men of the ten before mentioned had run back to camp at the time of the firing the night before, and reported that we were all taken prisoners, and in consequence of the rumor the brigade had been under arms all night and in fact a large portion of the troops of the right wing had partly changed front. I wrote Gen. Anderson a note setting the matter right, and about mid-day being relieved by a company from Gen. A.P. Hill's Division, I marched back to the line of battle and rejoined the regiment.

George Hillyer



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all too quickly.

Saturday evening, the CVBT Board of Directors, its invited guests, and many of our members came together for the actual annual meeting itself. After dinner, CVBT President Mike Stevens called the meeting to order. He reviewed the Trust's accomplishments during the past year, noting assets in excess of \$1 million and a cumulative total of just over 240 battlefield acres preserved. This increasing responsibility has required that the Trust hire an executive director, which luckily has been funded by an outside source. Dr. Stevens assured the members present that their organization was alive and well, effective and successful.

Dr. Stevens singled out several persons and organizations for further recognition. First, of course, were the members of the CVBT who have helped to save hallowed ground. Well done and thank you. Second was the Capital District Civil War Round Table of Albany, New York, which sent \$5,000 to help pay for the Trust's latest acquisition on the Chancellorsville battlefield. Again, thank you. Third was Jerry Brent for his tireless efforts to reg-

CVBT Receives Frank E. Vandiver Award of Merit

On May 20, 2004, the Houston Civil War Roundtable presented its Frank E. Vandiver Award of Merit to the CVBT. This remarkable award is an oversized minie bullet (about 12 inches tall), turned on a lathe from actual Butternut (who knew there was such a thing as a Butternut tree). Board member Harriett Condon represented the Trust at this presentation in Houston and she described this Civil War Round Table as a generous and hospitable group. We are pleased to receive this honor and renew our commitment to these good Texans, as well as our other supporters, to continue to acquire dirt and grass.

ister the CVBT in the Combined Federal Campaign, so the Trust will be eligible to receive donations through that large fundraising mechanism. Fourth was Gary Embrey, the CVBT webmaster, who was on duty with the National Guard, but whose work is evident for anyone who wants to access the CVBT website at www.cvbt.org. Fifth was the Sunshine Lady Foundation, which has stepped forward time and again to help the CVBT to publish its annual journal, *Fredericksburg History and Biography*, as well as to clean up acquired properties and to remove hazards such as open wells. Finally, Dr. Stevens thanked the Ralph Happel estate for its exceptionally generous donation to the Trust. He announced that the final accounting came to \$236,370.83. Further, the CVBT had developed an Annual Ralph Happel Award and intended to honor its first recipient that evening.

Bob Krick stepped forward to present the award. He noted that Ralph Happel, a graduate of the University of Virginia, had become the first historian of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania Battlefield Park, at its inception in the 1930s. He retired from this job in 1973, when Mr. Krick succeeded him. He reported that the Trust had developed an award of lasting quality, with funds from the bequest, not from member donations. He then introduced Robert J. Mrazek, former Congressman of New York, from Dan Sickles' old district. He described him as an ardent preservationist while in Congress and an author in retirement. Mr. Krick noted that the first time he entered the Congressman's office, he saw a Norden bombsight on his desk and a blown up photo of Henry Kyd Douglas hanging on the wall. Over the years, as Mr. Mrazek became instrumental in saving thousands of acres on many battlefields in central Virginia, his iron will reminded Mr. Krick of Stonewall. Since so many battlefields would have been destroyed without his intervention, it was seemly that he be the first recipient ever of the CVBT's Ralph Happel Award.

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Mr. Krick presented Mr. Mrazek with a first edition of Henry Kyd Douglas's memoir, with a presentation page bound inside. The award also included an engraved silver medal. Mr. Mrazek thanked the assembled group and described his passion and commitment to the extraordinary sacrifice of the Civil War soldiers. He told the group that he was not descended from any Civil War ancestors, but rather from someone who had been in the Czech Legion during the Russian civil war. During his tenure in Congress, he had represented an affluent part of New York that really did not need a lot of things. As a consequence, he was freed up to address the nation's historical heritage. He said Bob Krick had been a fearless mentor. With his guidance, and as a member of the House Appropriations Committee, he had responded to the opportunity to protect historic ground. He noted that Civil War preservation had been one of the greatest things in which he had participated. Mr. Mrazek, of course, received a standing ovation.

Dr. Stevens announced that CVBT founding member Jim Pates would be leaving the Board of Directors. He presented him with a copy of Gordon Rhea's new book, *Carrying the Flag*, signed by the author, by Brooks Simpson and John Hennessy, and by the entire CVBT Board of Directors. Mr. Pates thanked the group and said it had been an honor to be a part of the Trust. He recalled a lunch meeting in 1996, with the park superintendent, where he had observed that the only public speaker for preservation was the National Park Service. He thought it was time for the community to step up as well. He said he was proud of the job the CVBT had done since then and encouraged everyone to participate.

Erik Nelson presented a slate of nominees for the CVBT Board of Directors. There were no additional nominations from the floor. Nominations were closed and the following members elected by a vote of the membership present:

Rob Hodge (second term)

Bill Kinnamon (second term)

Jerry Logan (second term)

Linda Wandres (first term)

Mike Greenfield (first term)

Jerry Brent made the Treasurer's Report; for specifics on CVBT financials, please see our website at www.cvbt.org.

After a few other announcements, Dr. Stevens introduced Gordon Rhea, the evening's keynote speaker. Mr. Rhea spoke briefly of his own Civil War ancestor and then launched into a wonderful description of Charles Whilden, a hard luck individual who became an unlikely hero in the Army of Northern Virginia. He shared his research into Private Whilden's pre-war efforts to make a living as well as his wartime experiences where fate appeared to direct him to the hardest fighting unit in an army of hard fighting units. It was an excellent conclusion to an exceptional evening.

On Sunday morning, we took another group of our members on a tour of the sites they had helped to purchase in and around Fredericksburg. The program placed the various tracts of land within their historic context as well as highlighted the various techniques that had been used to acquire them. CVBT founder Jim Pates described how successful preservation requires different approaches for different circumstances. He illustrated how we accomplish outright purchase in fee simple (our preferred option), obtain different grants (so members are not being asked to fund everything), work with state and federal agencies, work out arrangements with developers, and even fight development where purchase of the land has been denied. The morning turned into a rather comprehensive, but enjoyable tutorial for successful battlefield preservation.

We look forward to providing another worthwhile annual meeting weekend next year.

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