



ON THE skirmish line

Newsletter of The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust

Trust Acquires Another Property in the Jackson Flank Attack Sector

Once again, the Trust's patience and presence has resulted in the acquisition of a piece of battlefield land *at a very good price*. It is not a large parcel in and of itself, but it is another 1.6 acres preserved in the important flank attack area of the Chancellorsville battlefield. As our veteran members know, the CVBT has diligently focused on the flank attack area since the Trust was formed. With this latest addition, we have acquired a total of 70 acres of battlefield terrain in that sector, which is in addition to the substantial acreage that the National Park and the Civil War Trust have protected.

Battlefield preservation is a long term endeavor and we appreciate the steadfast support of our members. They understand that a series of individual purchases is required to provide for the overall preservation of historic terrain. A five-acre purchase in 1998, for instance, kept a house site from being developed on the ridge where Jackson's Confederates crashed into the Union Eleventh Corps. Acquisition of 25 acres on the Talley Farm ridge the next year linked two portions of the National Park's holdings, where one day visitors will be able to stand and see the same vista that Stonewall Jackson saw when he reconnoitered the

Federal position. In 2012, the Trust acquired a 13-acre tract that included a visually intrusive, castle-like building that we demolished shortly thereafter. In between these purchases have been others, less dramatic perhaps, but steadily filling in the map that represents a significant part of the Chancellorsville battleground.

This latest parcel is on the south side of the wartime Orange Turnpike (modern State Route 3). It lies east of the Orange Plank Road (which leads to the Wilderness battlefield) and west of the Dowdall's Tavern site. Saving another 1.6 acres of battlefield land does not sound like much, but it looms large when it could have been the site of a new house and shiny cars, inevitably attracting the eye of visitors to this growing preserved landscape.

On the afternoon of May 2, 1863, Stonewall Jackson's troops deployed in a line that extended north and south of the Orange Turnpike (State Route 3). The Confederates moved from marching order into line of battle and then waited for the signal that would launch them out of the woods and into the vulnerable Federal flank. Around 5:30 p.m., Jackson turned to Robert Rhodes, whose division was stretched out primarily south of the road, and asked: "Are

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you ready, General Rodes?” Rodes assured him that he was and Stonewall turned that quiet spring afternoon into pandemonium, with the simple order: “You can go forward then.”

With a nod from Rodes, bugles immediately relayed the attack order up and down the line and the Southerners stepped off with a yell. George Doles’ Georgia brigade straddled the Turnpike, but as they went forward, the attack developed very differently to their right and left. North of the road, the Confederates pushed ahead rapidly, closing in on the Federal units, most of which were facing south. The Southern attackers pushed them out of the way before they could effectively redeploy. South of the turnpike, Alfred Colquitt slowed his brigade, claiming he saw Federals on his own flank. Colquitt’s hesitation halted Dodson Ramseur’s brigade behind him and thus kept several thousand Confederates out of the flank attack for a critical period. Ramseur finally persuaded Colquitt to resume his advance and they joined the main attack as it closed in on a hastily formed Federal line near Dowdall’s Tavern.

In the maelstrom of the surprise attack, the Federals managed to briefly establish lines facing west. These were quickly overwhelmed, but they did hold for a short period and allowed other units to withdraw with some semblance of organization. The first intermediate line occurred near Wilderness Church, where some low hilltops provided places to try to anchor a defensive position. The hard pressed Federals established a second intermediate line near Dowdall’s Tavern, again using the terrain to some limited advantage. The Trust’s latest acquisition is in the heart of this chaotic action, in the area between Wilderness Church and Dowdall’s Tavern.

This acquisition has all the hallmarks of a classic CVBT purchase. We identified this land for preservation over fifteen years ago. We maintained a regular contact with the owners,

which we do for many properties. This past year, when the owners finally indicated they were ready to sell, we were the folks they knew were interested in buying. As a result, we soon reached an amicable agreement.

In this instance, we are paying \$50,000 for a parcel that is assessed at \$48,000. The typical trend in this sometimes volatile real estate market is to have to pay above assessed value and there are still plenty of property owners who continue to ask two to three times what their land is worth. Our strategy in those instances has been to wait until circumstances change and a responsible deal can be made. We would certainly move quickly if there was an imminent threat of development, but much of the time we can be cautiously patient. This time, the owners set a realistic price at the outset and things moved quickly.

We have the cash on hand to pay this \$50,000 cost immediately and will not have to carry any interest costs as a consequence. We are able to do that because our members have generously helped us establish a war chest that allows rapid acquisition when needed. As we like to think with all of our efforts, this is the right property at the right price. Help us to replenish our war chest quickly though, so we can keep moving on. We closed on the property on May 25th and not having to pay interest on a bank loan ensures that member donations truly go for dirt and grass.

E-Newsletters available

Some folks prefer to receive certain types of mail in electronic format and that option is available for CVBT newsletters. If you would like to change your current newsletter mailing to an electronic distribution, please contact us at comdir@cvbt.org and we will make that change for you.



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ANNUAL MEETING RECAP

During the weekend of April 20–May 1, 2016, the Trust held its 20th annual meeting, celebrating two decades of battlefield preservation. After a cocktail hour and dinner on Saturday, April 29th, Trust president Mike Stevens called the group to order. He first took a look back 20 years and introduced five of eight original board members (including himself) who were present that evening. He then reviewed the year's activities and hinted at new things to come.

1

Report of Finances

Pete Kolakowski, on behalf of the Treasurer, gave the current status of Trust finances. He also reported that the Trust has managed to acquire over 1,000 acres of historic terrain that has a cumulative value today of \$8.9 million.

2

Election of Board Members

Dr. Mike introduced three sitting Board members: Rob Hodge, Mike Greenfield, and Eric Powell, who were nominated for another term. There were no nominations from the floor. All three were re-elected for another three year term.

3

Presentation of Ralph Happel Award

The Trust's Ralph Happel Award is presented to individuals who have made significant contributions to preserving battlefield land in the Fredericksburg area. Ralph Happel, of course, was an historian at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park from its earliest days in the 1920s until well after the Civil War Centennial in the 1960s. The coveted award is a silver medallion with Ralph Happel's likeness on one side with the other side individually engraved for the recipient.

The 2016 Award went to Harold (Hal) Wiggins, who recently retired from the Fredericksburg Field Office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Tasked with regulatory duties related to land disturbance and protection of water resources, Hal was not only highly pragmatic, but quite thorough. When considering permits



Mike Stevens presented the CVBT's Ralph Happel Award to Hal Wiggins.

for development that would disturb the natural flow and characteristics of streams and wetlands, Federal regulations direct the Corps to take into consideration the impact of the related activity on historic resources. In a region where so much Civil War history has been concentrated, Hal took such ancillary responsibilities seriously and used that provision to keep intact many visible resources that characterize and define this area's historic landscape.

Under Hal's guidance, through the federal regulatory process, developers were able to realize their plans, while also helping to avoid historic resources when possible. When avoidance of significant battlefield land was not possible, he helped them to come up with mitigating solutions. As the Fredericksburg area grew, he worked diligently with jurisdictional staffs, the National Park Service, and local orga-

(Annual Meeting Recap, continued on page 4)

nizations like CVBT interested in responsible land use. The following accomplishments are just a few examples of what Hal managed to do over the past several decades:

- ✓ Facilitated donations of land to the CVBT at Grant's Knoll (Wilderness) and Pelham's Crossing (Fredericksburg) when nearby land developed.

- ✓ Facilitated an open space easement around the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery monument (Spotsylvania Court House) when the Harris Farm at Spotsylvania Court House was subdivided.

- ✓ Routinely obtained buffering land adjacent to the National Park boundary when that land was developed (Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Spotsylvania Court House).

- ✓ Facilitated preservation of battlefield land at Smith Run (Fredericksburg).

- ✓ Helped a developer preserve earthworks where fighting had occurred at Chancellorsville, without loss of lot yield. Subsequent buyers embraced the concept when they bought houses there.

Hal was a solid partner to everyone he worked with and we were proud to be able to recognize what is really just a fraction of all that he did.

4

A Chat with Robert Hodge and Ed Bearss

The main event at our annual meeting was a conversation between our own Rob Hodge and Ed Bearss. In an exchange that will be presented in a future newsletter, Ed talked about his experiences in the Marine Corps, his time in the National Park Service, his advice to young historians, and a range of other topics that only Rob could have come up with. Stay tuned. See the photo below.

5

Tom Van Winkle Assumes Presidency of CVBT

When Mike Stevens stepped down as the CVBT president, Tom stepped up. He thanked Mike for providing leadership, fellowship, and friendship and introduced the new award that will be presented to worthy preservationists in his name. After thanking Mike again, he closed the proceedings.



Rob Hodge interviewed Ed Bearss at the Trust's 20th annual meeting. Note that both gentlemen cleaned up very nicely.

Confederate Earthworks Come Under CVBT Protection

The Janney family of Fredericksburg has donated a 4.7 acre tract on a ridge behind Fredericksburg that includes a surviving set of earthworks, occupied by Confederate forces during the December 13, 1862 battle of Fredericksburg. A portion of this overall property was developed several years ago, but a steep knoll with a gun pit and nearby supporting infantry trench was worthy of preservation and is now under CVBT ownership. This site is one of several earthworks that remain intact where the Confederate left flank became established in 1862 and was manned well into 1863. A description of this property and its relation to other nearby sites will be included in our next newsletter.

CVBT Supports Civil War Trust at Crossroads of Chancellorsville and Wilderness

The Civil War Trust has taken the lead on acquiring 355 acres of what used to be part of the Wilderness of Spotsylvania County. This tangled woodland was a battleground during the 1863 battle of Chancellorsville and again during the 1864 battle of the Wilderness. Battlefields in this region overlap, as we noted in last year's journal *Fredericksburg History and Biography* and this wilderness tract is one of the more obvious places where soldiers tramped across the same terrain twice. We are proud to support the CWT in this purchase by providing \$50,000 to help ensure this acquisition is made expeditiously under a very tight schedule.

At our annual meeting in April, Ed Bearss described this land as a key link between battlefields. He noted that at Chancellorsville, Hooker lost 16,000 men to Lee's 14,000 and retreated across the Rappahannock River. At the Wilderness, Grant lost 19,000 men to Lee's 10,000, yet kept moving on. The Civil War Trust is preserving this land where those events and those decisions were made. As Jim Lighthizer has noted in his own plea for funds, this property is being acquired for \$1.75 million, of which he still needs \$350,000. It is an exciting purchase and we are proud to donate \$50,000 of that amount to make it happen.

THE END OF AN ERA: PRESIDENT MIKE STEVENS STEPS DOWN

AT OUR 20TH ANNUAL MEETING, long time CVBT president Mike Stevens announced that he was stepping down from the CVBT board of directors. He became a part of this organization at its inception in 1996 and these past two decades of battlefield preservation have been his. Many have been involved with the CVBT, but he gave us voice and set a tone of cooperation and shared duty that resonated with everyone we worked with. To those gathered for the annual proceedings, Mike left us with the following statement:

"It has been an honor to have been a part of the leadership of this organization, and I am deeply grateful for the privilege of having been allowed to work with the greatest, most passionate and committed group of preservationists ever assembled. I will treasure the memories for the rest of my life."

In fact, the privilege and the honor have been ours and we intend to keep Mike's high standards of commitment and effective cooperation a visible part of what we do. To this end, the CVBT Board of Directors has established the Dr. Michael P. Stevens Preservation Award. It will be presented

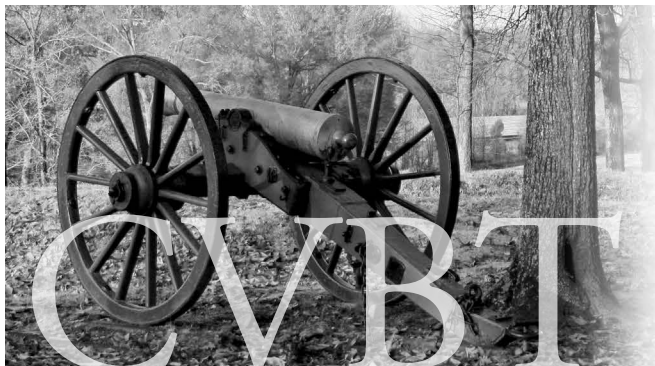


annually to an individual or a group that has contributed notably to the preservation of Civil War resources. The CVBT's Ralph Happel Award recognizes folks who have been instrumental in helping to preserve land. The Dr. Mike Award will pay attention to those who reflect a high standard of effectiveness and perseverance in site protection and management, which could certainly include its initial acquisition.

The rather substantial trophy will reside in the CVBT headquarters, with nameplates

engraved to show each year's winner. With the Trust hanging on to the trophy, the actual winner will have to settle for an accompanying \$1,000 in cash, a tangible reward to those who have done good things in our field. There are many people who do important preservation tasks for little compensation and this award will be a way to recognize their work. Be assured that these funds will not come from member donations, but from the board itself, as our tribute to Dr. Mike.

The first award celebrating Dr. Mike's legacy will be made in 2017.



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The Trust's mission is to purchase Civil War battlefield terrain and to advocate for battlefield protection at the local, state, and federal levels of government.

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.

Annual Member	\$ 35
Active Member	\$ 135
Sustaining Member	\$ 250

Patron	\$ 500
Benefactor	\$ 1,000
Life Member	\$ 5,000

Life Patron	\$ 10,000
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