

ON THE skirmish line

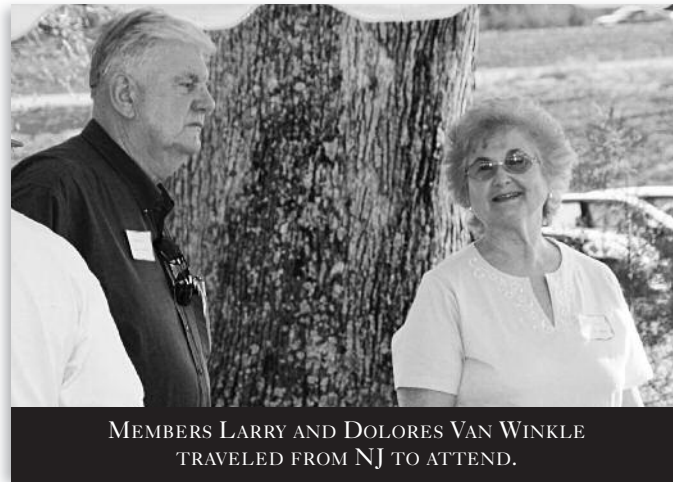
Newsletter of The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust

2009 Annual Meeting Held at Chancellorsville

The CVBT held its thirteenth annual meeting on April 25th, 2009, on a knoll just west of Wilderness Church, on the Chancellorsville battlefield. The CVBT has acquired several tracts of land in that Jackson flank attack area, all of them visible from the meeting site.

Members could readily see which pieces of the puzzle were in place and which ones are needed.

Earlier that afternoon, hardy members had tramped in the footsteps of Stonewall Jackson's Confederate infantry, following the route of their flank march on May 2, 1863. National Park historian Eric Mink led this intrepid group, from the Lee-Jackson Bivouac site, where Lee and Jackson met for the last time, to the Brock Road, where Jackson turned his columns south, to remain out of sight of the Union army. The weather was hot, but participants enjoyed the ambiance of historic ground, the camaraderie of knowledgeable companions, and the insightful discussion of an experienced guide. At the Brock Road, a van shuttled the group back to the north side of the



MEMBERS LARRY AND DOLORES VAN WINKLE TRAVELED FROM NJ TO ATTEND.

Orange Turnpike, where the tour continued across the terrain held by the Federals when they were overwhelmed by the charging Confederates. Eric conveniently ended the tour at the annual meeting site, where cold drinks were waiting, to be followed by a barbeque dinner.

Following dinner,

CVBT President Erik Nelson opened the formal meeting. He reviewed the CVBT's acquisitions in the flank attack area, most of which could be seen from the meeting site. He also pointed out the ground that CVBT still seeks to acquire. The focus of his report, though, was what the CVBT had done in 2008. He explained that the year had been spent with two projects. The first was raising funds to pay off the Slaughter Pen Farm—the 205 acre site that will effectively complete CVBT's work on the Fredericksburg battlefield. The second was concluding the effort to preserve an 18 acre property within the National Park boundary that includes the ante-bellum Howison House, known as Braehead.

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After a considerable effort, the CVBT helped to place an easement over the Braehead property, to be held by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. The house and its acreage finally sold, to a family that will live there and give it the care it deserves. CVBT preserved this property with a total outlay of \$150,000, which is well worthwhile for a property that is worth well over \$1 million. That task, however, kept us from concluding the Slaughter Pen project, so that campaign continues.

Lloyd Harrison delivered the Treasurer’s report. Tom

Van Winkle provided a report on a new DVD project that highlights the Fredericksburg battlefield—then and now—and which will be released later this year.

The following individuals were nominated and voted on to the Board of Directors:

- ★ Linda Wandres
- ★ Harriett Condon
- ★ Robert Krick

The annual meeting made clear that the CVBT is strong, its membership committed, but the threat of losing hallowed ground has not diminished. **sl**

REMEMBERING ANNE ROWE

President Nelson presented the Rowe family with a token of the Board’s esteem for former board member Anne Rowe, who has recently passed away. Anne’s connection with history was akin to Ralph Happel’s, in that she listened to the stories of those who had experienced or heard about the war first hand and had developed a clear understanding of its impact on families and communities.



The presentation piece was an effort to reconnect with that intimacy in a small way. Joe Rowe had been mayor of Fredericksburg when the Sergeant Kirkland memorial had been dedicated at the end of the Civil War Centennial, in 1965. The Trust acquired a small statue of the memorial and mounted it on a handcrafted wooden base, fabricated from wood that came from the 1850s crib dam. The crib dam had been in place across the Rappahannock River during the Civil War, but had been removed by the Corps of Engineers as part of an

environmental restoration project. In addition, Anne had spoken at the Kirkland memorial during one of the National Park’s memorial events there. Typically, speakers talk of sacrifice and preservation, but Anne, as one would expect, spoke of family and the ties of family that endure things such as a war exploding, quite literally, on their doorstep. She spoke of those who had experienced the war, those who had worked to recover

from that calamity, and those who were descended of them and continued the work of building a community.

Anne concluded her remarks with a story of two families that joined in marriage and ended by saying that they still live in Fredericksburg. She had not mentioned names, but everyone present recognized instantly that she was talking about herself and Joe. The moment was pure magic, and that truly was Anne. **sl**



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BILL HOWELL ACCEPTS THE RALPH HAPPEL AWARD FROM CVBT PRESIDENT, ERIK NELSON

CVBT Recognizes Bill Howell

Several years ago, the CVBT established its Ralph Happel Award, to recognize persons who have made an extraordinary contribution to preserving battlefield land in central Virginia. It is not a plaque, but rather a silver medallion, with the likeness of Ralph Happel, who became the first historian of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park in 1935.

Previous recipients have included Robert J. Mrazek—a New York congressman who was instrumental in the Park’s expansion; Brian Pohanka—an exceptionally dedicated preservationist; Ed Bearss—National Park Service historian emeritus; and Enos Richardson—first president of the CVBT and someone who was dedicated to preservation long before CVBT was formed.

The fifth Ralph Happel Award, presented at the Trust’s annual meeting, went to William J. Howell. Bill Howell has spent more than 20 years as an elected member of the Virginia House of Delegates and has been the Speaker of that body since 2003. His dedication to preserving Virginia’s historic heritage is evident in the many significant projects he has undertaken, including renovation of the State Capitol and the 400th anniversary celebration of the

Jamestown settlement. He recently established the Virginia Sesquicentennial American Civil War Commission, which has already had an enormous impact on planning for this multi-year event throughout the Commonwealth. Speaker Howell has also been a champion of the Slaughter Pen Farm acquisition, finding several ways for the Commonwealth to assist the efforts of the non-profit organizations.

Every year, the General Assembly wrestles with an exceptional amount of legislation. As bills are proposed, debated, and considered, Bill Howell still finds time in that seeming chaos to ensure that battlefield preservation is not forgotten. The CVBT thought it worthwhile to let him know that he is not forgotten either.

In addition to the silver medallion, CVBT president Nelson presented Bill Howell with Ralph Happel’s own copy of Goolrick’s History of Fredericksburg, rebound, with Ralph’s margin notes intact. Speaker Howell, who was in attendance with his lovely wife Cessie, thanked the group for their recognition, noting the importance of partnerships for preserving ground and providing opportunities for education. **SL**

FAMILIES DEDICATE PLAQUE TO FALLEN ANCESTOR

The area known as the Harris Farm saw combat action on May 19, 1864 and became the last of the battles fought around Spotsylvania Court House. The CVBT owns a portion of this field. In 2004 almost five total acres were acquired, a combination of land and easement. A 1.7 acre parcel is preserved within a low density residential neighborhood.

There are no trenches, but a line of trees, both old and new, marking a section of road and delivers visitors to the monument to the First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery.

As General Ulysses S. Grant shifted his forces in preparation for a march south, Robert E. Lee probed the Union position. Two Confederate divisions reconnoitered toward the Fredericksburg Road, but ran into the untested Union troops, newly arrived on the field. Fighting extended across the Harris, Alsop, and Peyton Farms, but the Federals held.

One of the casualties who fell on this field was Private James Zachariah Branscomb, CSA. Company D. Third Alabama regiment. After arriving in the Spotsylvania Courthouse area, Private Branscomb would take a few minutes to pen a letter to his sister Lucinda Caroline Branscomb Hunter back in Union



Springs, Alabama.

James would write, *“Dear sister, I can almost feel the anxious throbbing of your heart but could not write sooner. Today is the first mail we have had since the fight began.”*

“Today makes two weeks of fighting. Our regt has been engaged four times. I have never seen any fighting to compare with this. Our loss has been heavy but nothing to compare with the enemy. We have killed thousands. I have killed two myself.”

“I have been struck twice though pretty badly bruised. We have to fall in now—not quite ready to move. I shall write a little more. S.A. Stinson and Casey is killed. J.W. Baker is missing. Lewis is safe. The mail leaves now. We are yet in line of battle.”

James would not have time to sign his letter. May 19, the next day, he would be killed in action at Harris farm.

On May 8th of this year, nine of Private James Zachariah Branscomb’s family would visit this site,

the families of Branscomb and Chappell. They would travel from Alabama, Texas, Georgia, Washington D.C. and Northern Virginia. Earlier the family had contacted the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust in reference to placing a plaque at the site. Land specialist Mike Greenfield worked with the family and the result was the adoption of a tree lining the road and the placement of a plaque at the base of this tree.

The families had prepared a dedication service for this historical event. Reading from the letters of Private Branscomb, family decedents John and Albert Branscomb painted an emotional picture of the daily life he had faced during the war.

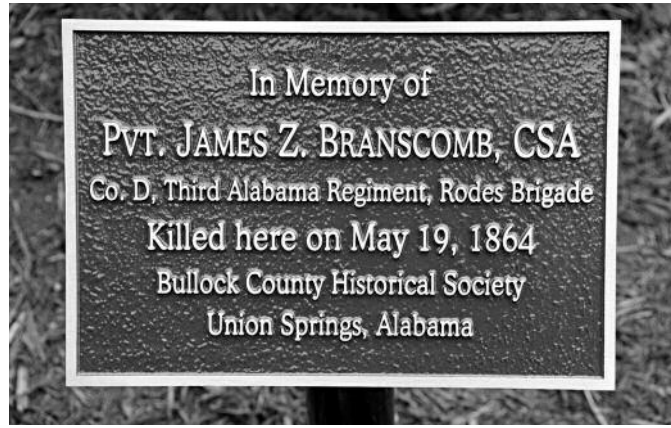
The ending of the ceremony was very special. As the location of private Branscomb’s grave is not known, the family did the next best thing.

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{FAMILIES DEDICATE PLAQUE,
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4}

“Uncle Jim, we wish that we could take you back to Alabama to be with your family..but that is just not possible. Instead, we have brought a small piece of Alabama to be with you.”

The family then each proceeded to sprinkle small amounts of soil they brought with them from Branscomb’s home. “We spread this rich Alabama



soil under your new cedar tree and pray that you rest in peace”

One of the family members turned to Tom Van

Winkle of Central Virginia Battlefields Trust and asked. “I guess we should have asked if we could do this but we figured it would

be OK”. Tom replied “I’m sure the mixing of Virginia and Alabama soil is quite appropriate, after all, Virginians and Alabamians’ mixed their blood on many battlefields.”

The letters of Private Branscomb have been published in a book entitled “Dear Sister” Civil War Letters to a Sister in Alabama by Frank Anderson Chappell. sl

Sesquicentennial Events in Virginia

The Commonwealth of Virginia has taken the lead in recognizing the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. The Virginia Assembly has established a Sesquicentennial Commission that is working with Sesquicentennial Committees throughout the state and developing plans for this significant event, which will stretch over several years.

On April 29th, several members of the CVBT Board attended the first of what is going to be a series of signature conferences related to the war. This event took place at the University of Richmond and was entitled “America

on the Eve of the Civil War.” There were 16 scholars on hand to discuss conditions as if it were 1859. The panels delved into social, political, and cultural issues and took questions from the audience, including an internet audience.

These conferences will be an annual event and be hosted by a different Virginia university each year. They are open to the public at no cost and we strongly recommend them. This first conference was absolutely fabulous and we look forward to others being equally provocative.

For additional information, go to the Virginia Sesquicentennial website at www.virginiacivilwar.org. The conference can be seen in its entirety at that site along with a wealth of additional information. sl



Stay on the Skirmish Line!

Take a look at the mailing label on your latest Skirmish Line newsletter. You will note your personal Central Virginia Battlefields Trust membership expiration date. To help us save on mailing costs and time, please be sure you are up to date on your membership. Although we will send out reminder letters to all our valued members, which means all members, that have somehow missed that all important valued task of Central Virginia Battlefields Trust membership renewal, we would appreciate your help. You might also consider upgrading your membership level to increase our ability to save the hallowed ground we all seek to preserve.



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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.

Membership Categories

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|-------------------|-------|-------------|---------|------------------|----------|
| Annual Member | \$ 35 | Patron | \$ 500 | Life Patron | \$10,000 |
| Active Member | \$135 | Benefactor | \$ 1000 | Corporate Member | \$ 500 |
| Sustaining Member | \$250 | Life Member | \$5,000 | Corporate Patron | \$ 1000 |



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