



ON THE
skirmish *line*
Newsletter of The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust

*“Allow me to pledge to CVBT
the amount of \$50,000”*

ANONYMOUS DONOR PLEDGES A DOWNPAYMENT

The CVBT has spent considerable time and effort to identify land that is critical to the integrity of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park—land which must absolutely be acquired. We also routinely track the status and availability of individual parcels that comprise this historic terrain. Most properties are not immediately for sale, so this monitoring can go on for years. On the other hand, sometimes identified properties come up for sale very quickly and we need to scramble to find the means to respond. This urgency is especially acute if we have recently made a substantial payment toward another property, such as the Slaughter Pen farm or Wilderness Crossroads.

One of our members contacted us recently and immediately relieved this potential source of anxiety. This benefactor pledged \$50,000 to CVBT, not to pay off an ongoing project, but to have in readiness for a new one. This gift is both exceptionally generous as well as innovative. In effect, we have a dedicated down payment immediately available as we pursue our next purchase.

This donation is anonymous and will stay that way until the donor decides otherwise. We can, however, share his/her words from our recent correspondence, located on page 2.

Dear CVBT:

Allow me to pledge to CVBT the amount of \$50,000.

I was introduced to CVBT 5-10 years ago during... I became a member, and since then have annually donated... Over the years I was impressed by the devotion of this organization, its savvy in acquiring property, and its lean/mean organization which devotes nearly every dollar of contributions to actual land acquisition rather than overhead.

I believe in the history of this country, and also in preservation of the environment. CVBT's acquisitions serve both purposes. I could be tempted to sit on my money and will it upon my death, but that is a ways off and I am acutely aware—as you alert us—that we have few years left to acquire and save precious historic ground in Virginia before urban sprawl forever places it beyond reach.

The next 5-10 years will be crucial. So let me “pay it forward,” as they say...

The point of this contribution is to give CVBT the seed money and the courage to buy up new land if and when you find something which is meaningful in historical terms and a reasonable buy in financial terms.

I would prefer that this gift remain anonymous. Because it is not about me... it's the cause we both believe in.

Best regards,

It is truly a privilege for us at the CVBT to associate with people of this caliber. We are also working diligently to secure another important piece of ground. SL



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LABELING THE LANDSCAPE



Names on the landscape include physical descriptions such as the Wilderness, the Canal Ditch, and any number of river fords. Other names reflect ownership, such as the Burton Farm, the Ashley tract, and Willis Hill. When CVBT acquires a property, we try to apply a name that resonates with its wartime significance. This task is relatively easy when a historic name already exists, like Talley Farm or Braehead.

When there is no conveniently recognizable name, we need to come up with a label that will be recognizable to our members and to the public, something that is compelling for purposes of fund-raising, so any outstanding debt can be paid off and the land transferred to the National Park Service. When we acquired a 100-acre parcel called the Ashley tract, we renamed the ground McLaws Wedge. Similarly, the 93-acre Atkins tract has been presented as Wilderness Crossroads.

Sometimes, however, a new name has already been coined, although it may be quite old. For years, CVBT maintained contact with a local farmer, in an effort to negotiate a price for 205 acres of agricultural property called the Pierson Farm. This property was eventually purchased in part-

nership with the Civil War Preservation Trust (now simply called Civil War Trust). As preserved battlefield terrain, the site reverted back to a name that had been informally assigned during or shortly after the war.

In the May 10, 1869 issue of the *Virginia Herald*, one of many advertisements noted land for rent. Two fields of the Mannsfield estate were available for planting crops, it read, as well as another “field south of the Stage Road, adjoining Smithfield, known as the ‘Slaughter Pen.’”

At the end of a devastating conflict, life went on to reclaim a blackened countryside. The local memory of the December battle of Fredericksburg is reflected in this post war newspaper ad, casually identifying the location of land for lease with the full expectation that prospective renters would know the exact location available. Interestingly, there is no mention of the potential for anyone planting crops to find human remains, unexploded ordnance, or various types of scrap metal. On the contested ground around Fredericksburg, those conditions were a given and perhaps not worthy of mention. **SL**

Annual Meeting Update

Our 2011 annual meeting is shaping up to be one of our most popular ever. Our tours are filling up fast and we have already secured a second, smaller bus for our Saturday trip to the Mine Run battleground. Because of the constraints at our various destinations, there will be no second bus for the Friday tour. There are still a few seats available on this second bus for Saturday and even a (very) few seats for Friday’s trip to Richmond.

On Sunday, we will bring a bus to the Contry Inn & Suites and depart on that morning’s tour at 8:45 a.m. We had planned to meet at the Fredericksburg battlefield Visitor Center, on Lafayette Boulevard, but the number of attendees has grown beyond the capacity of the National



Park’s parking area. We hope this change does not inconvenience anyone.

As we did last year, the annual meeting will include a silent auction. Visit our website to see the list of items already available for bid. See you at the meeting in April.

CVBT's Wilderness Properties—Closely Associated with U.S. Grant

The CVBT properties in the Wilderness are focused on the Union army's headquarters near the modern intersection of the Orange Turnpike and the Germanna Road (State Routes 20 and 3). In the southwest quadrant of these two roads is 19 acres of ground that came to us through donation from a local developer. There was no fund-raising campaign and members can be proud that their organization does not have to purchase every acre it preserves.

In the southeast quadrant of these two modern roads is the 93-acre tract that includes the historic crossroads of the Orange Turnpike and the Germanna Ford Road. This area was the northern fringe of the battlefield and became the staging area where troops were fed into battle. Lieutenant Colonel Horace Porter, on General U.S. Grant's staff, described the relation of the two areas now in CVBT ownership in his post-war account *Campaigning with Grant*.

It had become evident that the enemy intended to give battle in the heart of the Wilderness, and it was decided to establish the headquarters of both generals [Grant and Meade] near the place where they



were holding their present conference at the junction of these two important roads. [T]his spot became the central point from which nearly all the orders of the commander were issued during one of the most desperate battles in the annals of history...

A little to the east of the cross-roads stood the old Wilderness tavern, a deserted building surrounded by a rank growth of weeds, and partly shut in by trees. A few hundred yards to the west, and in the northwest angle formed by the two intersecting roads, was a knoll from which the old trees had been cut, and upon which was a second growth of scraggy pine, scrub-oak, and other timber. The knoll was high enough to afford a view for some little distance, but the outlook was limited in all directions by the almost impenetrable forest with its

interlacing trees and tangled undergrowth.

During the course of the Wilderness battle, Grant and Meade endeavored to control events from their headquarters on the knoll near the crossroads. Grant's first encounter with Robert E. Lee was exceptionally stressful as he also functioned as the new commander of all Federal armies. In Virginia, Grant confronted the legendary Southern commander and his incomparable army, with a Union army that was not his own and which he had not had a hand in preparing for battle. This awkward Union command arrangement never had a chance to work. George G. Meade certainly deserved accolades as the victor at Gettysburg and for avoiding disaster at Mine Run, but he was not professionally prepared to win the war in the East, which Grant soon discovered in early May 1864. The

tragedy of the Overland Campaign was that so many died while this flawed command structure evolved.

Soldier accounts from the early days of the campaign make it clear that the troops realized very quickly that they could have a confidence in Grant that they simply had not developed toward Meade. This confidence became evident during the march out of the Wilderness and once again the CVBT property at Wilderness Crossroads includes a significant terrain feature related to the night of May 7, 1864. When Grant and Meade rode away from the knoll where they had directed the battle, they followed the road that is still a dirt trace through the CVBT property that abuts the National Park holding at Wilderness Tavern. The many accounts of that night march reference the two Union generals using the Brock Road, on their way toward Spotsylvania Court House. The road on the Wilderness Crossroads property becomes the Brock Road and there should be no question that it is the avenue taken by Grant and Meade.

The route of the army's march, south rather than back across the Rappahan-

{CONTINUED ON PAGE 5}

nock River, generated a response within the ranks that rippled through the army like electricity. As Horace Porter wrote:

Soon after dark, Generals Grant and Meade, accompanied by their staffs, after having given personal supervision to the starting of the march rode along the Brock Road toward Hancock's headquarters, with the intention of waiting there till Warren's troops should reach that point. While moving close to Hancock's line, there occurred an unexpected demonstration on the part of the troops, which created one of the most memorable scenes of the campaign. Notwithstanding the darkness of the night, the form of the commander was recognized, and word was passed rapidly along that the chief who had led them



through the mazes of the Wilderness was again moving forward with his horse's head turned toward Richmond. Troops know but little about what is going on in a large army, except the occurrences which take place in their immediate vicinity; but this night ride of the general-in-chief told plainly the story of success, and gave each man to understand that the cry was to be "On to Richmond!" Soldiers weary and sleepy after their long battle, with stiffened limbs and smarting wounds, now sprang to their feet, forget-

ful of their pains, and rushed forward to the roadside. Wild cheers echoed through the forest, and glad shouts of triumph rent the air. Men swung their hats, tossed up their arms, and pressed forward to within touch of their chief, clapping their hands, and speaking to him with the familiarity of comrades. Pine-knots and leaves were set on fire, and lighted the scene with their weird flickering glare. The night march had become a triumphal procession for the new commander.

The bond between a commander and his troops is a powerful force. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia had developed a relationship of absolute confidence in one another that became the stuff of legend. Grant was able to forge a similar bond with the troops he led that was evident in the West as well as in Virginia. Note the reference above where the hard bitten veteran troops addressed Grant "with the familiarity of comrades." At the end of the Chancellorsville battle, Marse Robert had been cheered by his exhausted Confederates as the two wings of his army reunited after several tense and horrible days of combat. A year later, in the same Wilderness, the cheers were for U.S. Grant. Meade simply did not have the same effect and that is part of the dynamic that had such an impact on the 1864 campaign. SL

Stay on the Skirmish Line!



Take a look at the mailing label on your latest Skirmish Line newsletter. You will see that it includes your CVBT membership expiration date. As a dirt and grass outfit, members can help us save on mailing costs by checking that expiration date and sending in their renewal on their own. If the date is highlighted, your membership has expired. While we would like to share the Skirmish Line with everyone, we can only afford to send it to current members. So please renew your membership at the appropriate time (we are not like magazines that like to get renewals six months in advance of expiration). You might also consider upgrading your membership level, to increase our capability to save hallowed ground in central Virginia.



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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.

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