

ON THE skirmish line

Newsletter of The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust



Memories of the Annual Meeting



Several moments from CVBT's last annual meeting stand out and deserve to be highlighted. Since it is unlikely that everyone was able to see everything, here are some of the things you might have missed:

Attendees of Scott Walker's Saturday tour of Lower Fredericksburg were surprised to be joined by CVBT Board Member Charles G. McDaniel as they briefly stopped by his historic home overlooking the middle pontoon crossing.

Everyone knows that CVBT Board Member Robert Lee Hodge can tell a story. Hodge's Saturday dinner recounting of the first time he met D.P. Newton deserves transcription:

When I walked in [to Whiteoak], I saw this full-scale artillery piece, and it was...it looked textbook to me, it was so new looking, I'm like, "This can't be original." I heard that



Robert Lee Hodge later appeared in Confederate uniform for the tour of Stevenson Ridge.

the museum had all of these original relics, and I looked at it, and I said, "This isn't original is it?" [speaking to D.P. Newton:] Now I'm going to butcher your accent, but he's like "Oh, no sir." And I'm like, "Well, where'd you get it?" "Oh, I—I made it." I'm like, "You made this?" And his mother, who I loved, she said, "And D.P. didn't use any power tools, either."

Then John Hennessy, being with the NPS, said: "Where'd you get the tube?"—the barrel for the cannon—and D.P. said, soft-spoken "Oh, I—I

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made that.” And Hennessy’s like, “How’d you make it?” D.P.’s like, “Well, I took some scrap metal from around the yard, welded it together and sanded it down and bored out the barrel. I wouldn’t shoot it, though.” And Hennessy’s like, “You ... made ... the tube.” He just couldn’t believe this artistic—this amazing—this sensory overload. I didn’t smoke cigarettes, and I wanted to go out and have a cigarette after being there ten minutes.... I was floored by this place and I couldn’t stop talking about it... The place is a sanctuary. And it’s, to me, the best museum to the Civil War in the world. It’s not corporate—it’s homespun.

The tailored presentation by Bob Zeller of 3D Civil War photography that followed dinner collectively informed and enthralled members, many of whom broke from their tables in order to get a better look at a rare photograph of Lincoln amidst a crowd in Gettysburg. Zeller introduced many to the lost world of Civil War stereoscopy, showing



John Griffiths poses for a photo between his ancestor’s doors at Stevenson Ridge.

us familiar images for the first time as they were truly meant to be seen. The existence of short Civil War “movies” made by photographers taking four shots in rapid succession amazed all present.

Sunday morning at the Stevenson Ridge brunch, Mr. John Griffiths posed for a photo in front of a remarkable set of walnut neo Greco-Roman doors from the 1870s. John, a true friend of CVBT, is a descendant of Ulysses S. Grant. The doors once adorned Grant’s townhouse in Washington, D.C., during the Johnson administration when Grant was General in Chief of the army. In a sobering moment, it dawned upon many present to think how much the United States has changed since the last time Grant’s blood passed between those very same doors. It was difficult at that

moment not to feel some tangible connection to the past, something all our members have likely felt at one time or another.

New Board Members

The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust (CVBT) has elected three new members to its board of directors. Chris Mackowski, John McManus, and Eric Wittenberg. Each will serve three-year terms.

“John and Eric both bring excellent experience as attorneys, expertise a preservation organization like ours can always benefit from, and Chris and Eric are both top-notch

historians,” said Tom Van Winkle, president of CVBT. “We have some projects in the works right now that are particularly relevant to their skillsets, so their additions to the board come at a fortuitous time for us.”

Chris Mackowski, Ph.D., is the editor-in-chief and co-founder of Emerging Civil War website, and the award-winning series of books by the same name. Mackowski is a professor of journalism and mass communication at St.

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The 5th Corps Tract and The Initial Fighting on The First Day of Spotsylvania

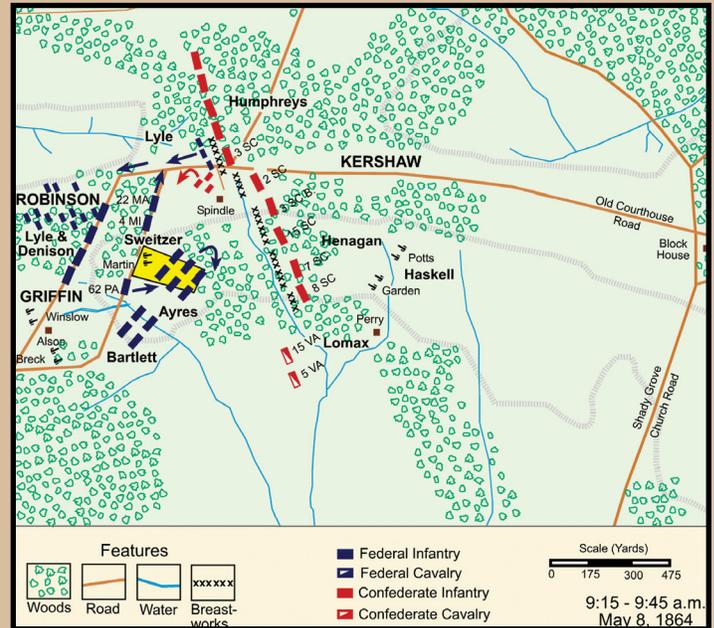
The CVBT's newly acquired property along Brock Road was closely associated with the first day's fighting on May 8, 1864, when the Union assaulted "Laurel Hill" at the Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse. Several accounts by contemporaneous figures locate the property in conjunction with the fighting.

The property acquired by CVBT can best be described as roughly rectangular, with a rise (currently occupied by an abandoned house of no historical value) on the north where the property runs along Brock Road, a gradual downward slope dropping approximately forty feet over a tenth of a mile to a creek, and then rising gradually again to connect with the National Park Service land at Hancock Road where the main Union entrenchments were later made. To understand the character of the hurried advances across the terrain, it is crucial to understand the opening stages of infantry fighting on May 8.

After several small delaying actions by Confederate cavalry, which caused a major bottleneck for the Federal army coming down Brock Road, the engagement began in earnest with the exhausted advance of first Peter Lyle's and then Andrew Denison's brigades across Sarah Spindle's field. Their advances occurred east of CVBT's property. The troops were exhausted from intermittently marching and standing since 9:00 p.m. the previous night. On top of that, the day was rapidly heating up, with temperatures in excess of 90 degrees.

Lyle's advance on the Spindle field would be checked by the 3rd South Carolina, which only managed to reach their key position when the Federal troops were sixty yards away. Denison's brigade would advance under the personal command of division commander John C. Robinson. The brigade broke into a panic as some of the first ranks stopped to fire while their comrades behind them pushed through, breaking unit cohesion. Officers lost control of their men. Robinson was shot out of the saddle 50 yards from the Confederate position, later losing his leg. Denison simultaneously was shot, later losing his arm.

Because of the bottleneck along Brock Road, the reinforcements of Joseph Bartlett's brigade (of Griffin's Division rather than Robinson's) quickly formed into line of battle along the road in the vicinity of the north end of CVBT's new property. Rather than coming up the road into the rear of the units already engaged, they aimed to come into the right of Denison. These troops were no better rested. The preceding march had been punctuated with "starts and stops" resulting in a "dila-



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tory pace...well calculated to aggravate weariness," as Eugene Nash of the 44th New York recorded. One of the brigade commander's aides shouted: "Hurry up, or you won't get a shot at them." Initially convinced that they were up against a light force of dismounted Confederate cavalry, the brigade was quickly disabused of that notion. They came "under a galling fire of infantry and artillery" as they began their charge at approximately 9:00 a.m., shortly after leaving the southeast edge of CVBT's property. After crossing the Spindle farm, they reportedly would get within twenty yards of the Confederate line before opening fire. Some accounts reported bayonet fighting over the Confederate works.

On the heels of Bartlett's brigade was Romeyn Ayres's brigade, rushing to the sound of the guns in what one soldier of the 140th New York called "mad, blind style." The men struggled to keep up with their general as his horse outpaced them. As the brigade crossed over the land that CVBT now holds, they may have been serenaded with the "cheerful and inspiring" music of their brass band, ordered by Ayres to try

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A decaying residence at the north end of the 5th Corps property sits beside the historic Brock Road.



The “little stream” midway across the property still runs into the Po River. Union soldiers were forced to cross it in their exhausted advance.

(Fifth Corps Tract, continued from page 2)

to buoy his exhausted men forward. Many of the men who walked over the property would never walk back. According to historian Gordon Rhea, of the five hundred men with the 17th U.S. Regulars, only seventy returned. Disorganized, the brigade went into the attack bit by bit. Porter Farley of the 140th New York blamed their failure on their “dribbling into the attack regiment after regiment.”

The Confederate extension of their line to the right—which threatened the Union left flank—forced Lyle and Denison’s brigades to fall back by about 9:15 a.m.; Bartlett and Ayres shortly joined them. The pulling back of the Union infantry left the Union Third Massachusetts Battery in a vulnerable position from where they had come up to offer ineffectual support to the Union advances. The six twelve-pounder Napoleons were reportedly forced to fall back to the vicinity of CVBT’s property as Confederate advances across the Spindle field threatened to capture the guns. As Augustus Buell in his controversial account notes, “The battery fell back with them by the right-hand road, about half a mile, to a small knoll which commanded the valley of a little stream running from our right into the Po.” This description matches the northern section of CVBT’s new property, which then became an impromptu defensive line for the rallying Union troops. NPS Historian Frank O’Reilly has concluded, “We believe this to be a reference to the knoll on the [CVBT] tract.” A Lieutenant Appleton who was on the scene remembered, “They were on the second line, in position on the right of the road to guard against an attack on our flank.” This would place the battery right at the north end of the property. While in this area, the commander of the battery,

Captain A.P. Martin would be severely wounded, getting hit in the back of the neck, “grazing the spine.” The entire movement was tracked by the guns of the Confederate batteries. One eyewitness remarked, “It seemed to be every man for himself, and the devil for us all.”

As Sweitzer’s Brigade came up, they too would have been placed along the northern edge of the property. By 10:30 a.m., the ground would again become a path of advance for Gregg and Robinson’s brigades (now of Cutler’s division) as they launched a second, more coordinated but ultimately unfruitful attack against the rapidly reinforcing and dug in Confederates.

The property would continue to play an important role through May 10th and 12th as the Union army continued to use it as an organizational area just arrears of their front line. By May 14, the Union army had withdrawn from the position to reorganize on the Fredericksburg Road, leaving the 3rd Georgia Sharpshooters, Parker’s Virginia Battery, and Brigadier General Pierce M. B. Young’s cavalry brigade to reclaim the uncontested position briefly before falling back to their own lines.

Those curious to learn more would do well to consider both Gordon Rhea’s 1997 book *The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern, May 7-12, 1864* and Gregg Mertz’s excellent 2004 article in volume 21, number 4 edition of *Blue and Grey Magazine*.

There is no doubt that CVBT has saved an incredibly important parcel in the 5th Corps tract. But much remains to be done: the non-historical structure requires demolition, wells require filling, and trash and debris need to be removed. We remain dependent upon the irreplaceable support of our members and their generous contributions to help fund our work.

An Eagle Earns His Wings

Aspiring Eagle Scout Gabriel Hupp joined up with CVBT to see what he could do to help his local battlefield. Upon hearing that the Stonewall Brigade Tract at Chancellorsville needed some well-deserved maintenance, Mr. Hupp sprang into action. He organized more than a dozen youth and adult volunteers to help with the project, which he personally fundraised. Over the course of two days, they performed a number of much-needed tasks, beginning with the deconstruction of 150 feet of anachronistic barbed wire fence where the property fronts Route 3.

The stretch was replaced with period-correct post-and-rail fencing. Each post required its own three-foot hole, accomplished via a handheld auger. After accomplishing this backbreaking work, Mr. Hupp constructed two wooden bench-style picnic tables and cleared the grounds of deadfall debris.

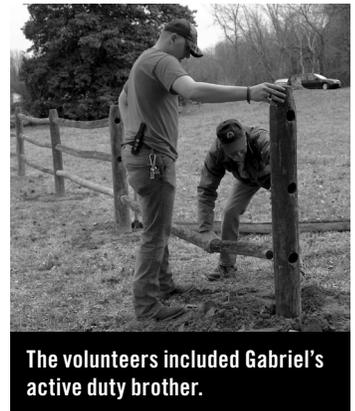
The Stonewall Brigade Tract, as a result of these attentions, appears very well maintained and will serve as a memento of Mr. Hupp's dedication to the battlefield. CVBT congratulates him on attaining the rank of Eagle Scout and wishes him the best as he graduates high school.



Gabriel Hupp and James Ruth measure twice before drilling and bolting boards into place on a picnic table frame.



Volunteers had to measure and dig carefully to ensure that the pre-cut rails would fit into the posts.



The volunteers included Gabriel's active duty brother.

{New Board Members, continued from page 2}

Bonaventure University in Allegany, NY, and historian-in-residence at Stevenson Ridge. He has also worked as a historian for the Fredericksburg NPS. Mackowski has authored or co-authored more than a dozen books and numerous articles on the Civil War. He also serves on the national advisory board for the Civil War Chaplains Museum in Lynchburg, Virginia.

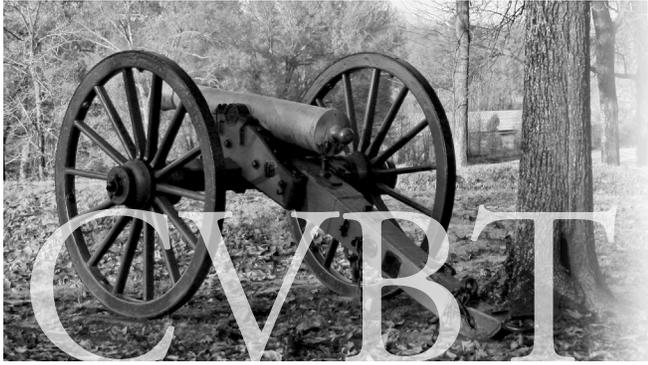
A native of Springfield, Virginia, attorney John McManus has called Fredericksburg, home for more than 22 years. As managing partner of Hirschler Fleischer's Fredericksburg office and a member of the firm's board of directors, McManus is active in the local business community and committed to preserving the area's rich history. McManus's law practice focuses on commercial real estate law, corporate and general business law, and estate planning. He earned his undergraduate

degree in history from Bowdoin College, his master's degree in real estate from Johns Hopkins University, and his law degree from Washington & Lee University School of Law.

Eric J. Wittenberg is an award-winning historian, blogger, speaker, and tour guide. His specialty is Civil War cavalry operations, and much of his work has focused on the Army of the Potomac's Cavalry Corps and on the Gettysburg Campaign. He is the author of 21 published books on the Civil War and more than three-dozen articles that have appeared in various national magazines. He is also deeply involved in battlefield preservation work and often assists the American Battlefield Trust—formerly the Civil War Trust—with its efforts. He is also an attorney in private practice. He and his wife, Susan, reside in Columbus, Ohio.

E-Newsletter available

The CVBT endeavors to maintain close contact with those who generously support its mission. We do this through a quarterly newsletter that is a tangible reminder in your mailbox of our regard and appreciation. Some organizations think they can save money by converting to an electronic format, but we have found that not everyone considers a lack of paper to be a convenience. Still, we give members the option of receiving their newsletters via e-mail. 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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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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