

The Camp Olden Gazette

News from the Camp Olden Civil War Round Table

Summer 2017

President's Gavel.

Dear Camp Olden, Friends and Members - Spring is here with Summer to follow and we're almost in September when we'll be celebrating our 25th Anniversary at the "reception" at the Museum and Abbott House with Charlie Zahm our civil war balladeer's voice wafting across the warm September evening. The event will be held on September 7th (First Thursday in September) so mark your calendar. The Abbott house will be part of the evening with the President of Hamilton Historical Society as our tour guide. Finger food and sparkling cider will be set out in the historic dining room on the center table as guests wander through the centuries old home. Attire for the evening is "Period dress" or "Old Fashioned" to bring the true "living history" feeling to our 25th Anniversary celebration.

Our programs are set for the 2017 year, thanks to our Secretary, Carole Moore, our Program Reminder, John Allen, and our Publicity Chairman, Martin Mosho, who have worked well together. I want to give them credit for the time and effort they spent on behalf of the Camp Olden Civil War Round Table family and members. Interesting programs make our meetings have a larger audience.

Recently we had a renowned speaker, Trish Kauffman, who drove up and back again to Delaware to provide us with a spectacular illustrated program on "Confederate Postage". The weather was really bad for our members who come from a distance so, if you missed this informative event, she will be doing similar programs. For more information see: <https://www.trishkauffmann.com/show-schedule>.

Our June program will be presented by one of our members Martin Mosho. His topic will be *Hallowed Ground - Putting the Civil War Dead to Rest*. Following is a brief synopsis:

750,000 men died in the American Civil War but the tragedy was magnified by disrespectful burial practices where large numbers of bodies were dumped, unidentified, into trenches. Enemy soldiers were frequently not buried at all and left to rot where they fell. This program covers this issue and shows how after the war federal and state governments sought to rectify the matter.

We are fortunate to have Martin as our member half the year acting as our part time Publicity Chairman along with our Secretary. (Anyone wishing to do publicity from December thru May when Martin is in Florida, please let me know.)

As most of you know, I do a television show "History for my Grandchildren" and, in conjunction with that effort, I am pleased to announce "a series" of "First Person" interviews with President Abraham Lincoln (Our Bob Costello). So far we have covered Lincoln's childhood, the move to the mid-west, Springfield, Mary Todd, 1860 Convention, Inaugural Trip to Washington and the beginning of his Presidency. In following episodes of this Lincoln Series, we will cover the search for a general and the war years. The President assured me that General Grant will be with him in our next visit. Did you know the President who was a "rail splitter" and "woodsman" was also a customer at Tiffany's? Tune in and learn more. These shows are available live, and then "On demand " for thirty days, at the studio or at www.radiovisionnetwork.com. Look for "History For My Grand Children" and "The Lincoln Series".

Volunteers are always needed here at Camp Olden. Al and John have volunteered to be emergency "food/snack picker uppers" if someone can't do it at last minute. Just find their contact information on the new Membership list that Dorothy and Alex put together. We need a

"Hospitality" chairperson to coordinate efforts and keep the list. We thank Connie for doing it in past years, but, her job as Treasurer is enough for one team member. Won't you volunteer? Call my cell phone if you have suggestions for our Camp. 609-433-7979 or my secretary at 609-433-7979 any time. We're always available except Wednesday mornings when we are on live television.

Your obedient servant,
Bill ♦

The **Camp Olden Civil War Round Table** of Hamilton meets at the Hamilton Public Library located at **1 Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. Drive; Hamilton, NJ.** on the first Thursday of the month (except August).

Upcoming speakers are:

June 1 - Martin Mosho - *Hallowed Ground - Putting the Civil War Dead to Rest.*

July 6 - Jamie Malanowski - *"Commander Will Cushing, Daredevil Hero of the Civil War"*
(reference previous article – Winter 2014 newsletter)

October 5 - Kenneth J. Serfass portraying Ulysses S. Grant (first person impression).

November 2 - Gary DeSiver discussing Ironclad Evolution. ♦

Coming Events –

Saturday, June 17 – Sunday, June 18 - Civil War Skirmish and Encampment at the Historic Village at Allaire, Wall, NJ. Join the Historic Village at Allaire as we welcome the Civil Skirmish and Encampment to our grounds as they reenact life during the Civil War. Visitors can travel back in time to explore Civil War Roadshow where you can have your family treasures identified and appraised. Join the crowds in watching and participate in military drills, meet President Lincoln and influential military figures, as well as learn about the lives of soldiers and civilians. A skirmish between Confederate and Union Troops will take place throughout the village each day in the afternoon. There are special lecture series, musical programs, camp tours and much more taking place. Other events will take place including: Dress parade, artillery

demonstration, baseball game, Victorian dance demonstration, Libby Prison minstrels and tin type photography. Admission is \$5 per car. There is also a lantern tour for \$20 from 7pm to 9:30pm. For information: <https://allairevillage.org/event/6775/>

Saturday, August 5, & Sunday, August 6 - Annual Parker Press Civil War Living History Weekend in Woodbridge, NJ, 10-4 both days. Witness soldiers from Union and Confederate forces skirmish, view weapons and medical demonstrations, visit military and civilian camps, speak with Civil War living historians and reenactors. Saturday candlelight visits. Free parking and admission. Sponsored by Robert E. Lee Civil War Round Table of Central NJ. See: <http://www.releecivilwarroundtableofcentralnj.com/>. ♦

SUNSHINE CORNER

By Marilyn Evan

Well, it seems as if our members are doing well health wise since no one has contacted me to send out get well wishes and that is happy news. If you do know of anyone who is in the hospital or at home recuperating from surgery, accident or illness, please let me know as soon as possible so we can send a card out to let them know we are thinking of them. Sometimes a simple thing like receiving a card in the mail is just the thing to bring a smile to someone's face or lift their spirit if they are having a difficult day. My e-mail address is mje6466@yahoo.com or you can contact a board member to give me the info. This month we are sending out "Happy Birthday" wishes to all our members who were summer babies and will be celebrating their birthdays in the months of June, July & August.

Joe Seliga	6/6	Robert Dunphy	7/18
John Emely	6/15	Jennifer Reynolds	7/20
Connie Davis	6/24	Michael Mazzocchi	8/3
Stanley Saperstein	6/26	John Allen	8/18
Reagan Reynolds	7/13		

And to Sue DeSiver whose birthday was May 29th. So sorry your name was left off the birthday list in the last newsletter. Hope you got to do something special and had a wonderful birthday. ♦



Civil War Visits.

Our members did some traveling over the past few months. Following is a “field report”.

Trip to Washington D. C.

Contributed by Mike Mazzocchi



On our recent spring trip to Washington we were accompanied by friends and fellow Camp Olden members Marilyn and Ted Evan, Nancy and Ken Ritchey and Cindy and Stanley Saperstein. (Sue and Gary DeSiver who did much of the early planning were unable to join us because of last minute issues.)

En route to meet the group, Corinne and I stopped at the National Cryptologic Museum adjacent to National Security Administration Headquarters Fort Meade, MD. The exhibits ranged from an 18th Century cipher device to modern day. Of particular note to civil war enthusiasts were a replica of a Confederate cipher disk and an extremely rare Confederate cipher reel (One of two known to have survived the war.) which was captured by Union forces at the surrender of Mobile, Alabama, in May 1865. Also on display were an Enigma Machine and a Navy Cryptanalytic Bombe used to decipher World War II German Enigma messages. For more information about this museum see <https://www.nsa.gov/about/cryptologic-heritage/museum/>.



Confederate Cipher Reel



Confederate Cipher Disk

On our first full day, the group visited the National Museum of the American Indian and then later in the day Corinne and I joined the Evans in visiting the National Gallery of Art which displays a memorial commemorating the valiant efforts of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and

the men of the 54th Massachusetts, the first Civil War regiment of African Americans enlisted in the North. Commissioned from the celebrated American sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens in the early 1880s and dedicated as a monument in 1897, this display is the sculptor's plaster version of the Shaw Memorial which has been acclaimed as the greatest American sculpture of the 19th century. The bronze version of the memorial can be seen on Boston Common. For further information see the following website: <https://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.102494.html>



Shaw Memorial (Plaster Version)

We also viewed an exhibit of Civil War photography, and, as a personal trip highlight, I enjoyed revisiting the works of Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Vermeer and so many others.

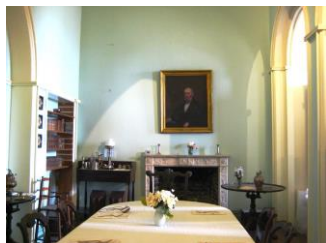
Our group next spent a full day at George Washington's Mt. Vernon. The new museum interprets the development of our nation with references to slavery which later became the main issue of the Civil War. For more information see: <http://www.mountvernon.org/>.

Before heading home Corinne and I visited Arlington House (Custis-Lee Mansion) situated overlooking the John F. Kennedy Memorial in Arlington Cemetery.



Arlington House

We met the Evans and took a guided tour of the house, which included the family dining room where Robert E. Lee proposed to his wife Mary and their private chamber. For information see: www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Explore/History/Arlington-House.



Family Dining Room



Private Chamber

We all had a great time and learned many new things. Special thanks to our auto tour guides Ken and Stanley who led us on routes to less visited and unusual attractions. ♦

Where Am I?

Where Am I? features one or more photographs showing distinct aspects of a Civil War battlefield with perhaps a hint or two. Your job is to identify the battlefield. Here's an Editor's choice for this issue:



This 1864 battle was a Union victory. One of the Confederate casualties died in his family home (above) which was on the battlefield.



The bodies of four Confederate generals were laid out on the porch of this nearby plantation. ♦

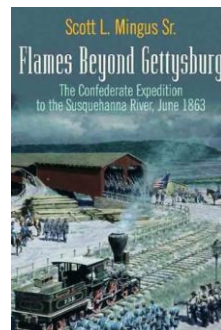
Where Am I? (Answer on page 12)

Book Review

Following is a book review submitted by Camp Olden CWRT member John Allen

Flames Beyond Gettysburg

by Scott L. Mingus, Sr.



This book will be familiar to any member who was able to attend the February Camp Olden Round Table meeting featuring Mingus. While not the blood bath that followed at the Battle of Gettysburg, this entertaining book covers the Confederate's 1863 invasion of Pennsylvania in detail. It arguably documents more of a soldier's "everyday life" than the more popular battle books: the surrender of small - but important - towns, often without a fight; a 15-minute battle between Early's ANV division veterans and green Pennsylvania militia plus some recuperating Army of the Potomac soldiers; foraging on a grand scale. While fatalities were few and far between, the "what if's" are staggering:

- What if the Columbia Bridge wasn't burned by the Pennsylvania Militia? Would Ewell's Corps have successfully marched on and captured the State capital of Harrisburg?
- How would the three-day battle at Gettysburg been different if Ewell's Corps was later in descending on the Union XI Corps from northeast of town?
- Would Ewell's Corps have even been recalled by Lee if they had captured Harrisburg and marched on Philadelphia?
- Would Ewell have been trapped and destroyed on the east bank of the Susquehanna River?

The only previous book I've read (although not the only book on the subject) was Wilbur Nye's

1965 "Here Come The Rebels!" In that book the Confederate infantry crosses into Pennsylvania on page 244 in a 366 page book. By contrast, Confederate infantry enter the State (June 22, 1863) on page 72 of "Flames..." 338 pages (excluding appendixes, including a road tour). The former book spends a significant amount of time discussing the early encounters at Winchester and in Maryland. While Mingus' book discusses these, the emphasis is clearly on Pennsylvania's experience and the ensuing panic of the citizenry as they escape to Lancaster County, across the Susquehanna.

Two learning points for me were that the invasion of Pennsylvania had as its objectives more than simply relieving Virginia of the devastation wrought by the War and Union troops. Capturing the anthracite coal fields of eastern Pennsylvania would result in Confederate control over the sole source of fuel for the Union Navy blockading the Southern coastline. Even if the successful capture of major Northern cities did not result in foreign recognition, the Union blockade would have been difficult or impossible to maintain, giving new life to the Rebellion. The second learning was the rare "misbehavior" of Confederate troops. I construed this as a figment of "Lost Cause" propaganda as documented in John Gordon's book "Reminiscences". However, Mingus quotes a number of local Pennsylvania newspapers referring to many similar examples of Confederate restraint.

My only criticism of the book is a paucity of maps. The author cites specific geographic localities which, if I were more familiar with southern Pennsylvania, add greatly to one's understanding of the routes followed and the troop maneuvers made as the Confederates swept toward the River. That minor criticism was easily remedied by downloading the pertinent mid-19th Century maps of the area from the Pennsylvania Archives website. These maps often enable the reader to follow the invading force and identify smaller towns and, often, individual residences where the troops encamped and commandeered horses and other - more tasty - items.

(These maps can be found at: www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/mg/di/m011/CountyMapsInterface.htm). ♦

Save the Date

On Saturday, September 30, Scott Mingus (Meeting speaker February, 2017) will lead a tour covering the sites associated with Confederate General John Gordon's advance to the banks of the Susquehanna River prior to the Battle of Gettysburg. These actions are discussed in Scott's book, ***Flames Beyond Gettysburg***.

Costs will be kept to a minimum by carpooling rather than hiring a bus. Scott's fee is a very reasonable \$100 for a 9-hour tour. Participants' share of that cost will be a flat \$10, with "overage" used to purchase Scott's lunch and tip. This, plus gas, tolls (depending on the route taken) and lunch (we will likely stop at Old Country Buffet in York for lunch where there is a private meeting room) and hotel (if you so choose), is the sum total of your cost. When you live in New Jersey, there aren't many opportunities to visit Civil War sites in a single day and experience a tour with a knowledgeable guide! (By the way, Scott is a "sanctioned Civil War tour guide for the York County Heritage Trust", so we'll be in excellent hands!) Timing for departure and return are still "up in the air". If you decide to confine it to a single day, my guess is that you can leave the Trenton area by 7 AM and return before midnight.

Here is Scott's trip description:

Begin in Gettysburg. Discuss Lee's invasion, the background, and Jubal Early's specific role. Tour sites associated with the June 26, 1863, skirmishing, follow John Gordon's route to York with intermediate stops. Stop in Hanover Junction to follow the events leading up to June 27, 1863. Discuss the junction's military importance, the Rebel cavalry raid, the junction's key role in the evacuation of wounded from Gettysburg after the battle and then Lincoln's visit in November, 1863.

York: Tour Penn Park, discuss the US Army Hospital there (2,000 wounded from Gettysburg were treated there), discuss the surrender of York; Jubal Early's ransom, etc.

Wrightsville: Two to three stops, depending upon time and interest. Discuss the bridge burning.

Columbia: Tour the African-American Cemetery with graves of men from the famed 54th Massachusetts.

For further information contact John Allen at johninretirement@gmail.com. ♦

Rutgers Goes to War

Contributed by Steve Glazer, Lieutenant Colonel, USA (Ret.)

In the decades immediately following the Civil War, many American colleges published complete catalogs of their alumni who had served in either the Union or Confederate forces. Rutgers College in New Brunswick -- later becoming the state university of New Jersey -- was not among them. It was not until 150 years later that this historical omission was rectified.

Recent research has revealed that the total number of Rutgers men serving during the Civil War was about 165 former students -- at least 17 having died in service -- drawn from the college's classes of 1827 through 1873. This collegiate corps of veterans included about three dozen medical personnel (mostly Union army surgeons) and about two dozen Union chaplains (not surprising in view of the college's religious roots). The remainder served mostly in combat positions in the infantry, artillery, and cavalry, as well as in the Union navy. Some few served in the U.S. Sanitary Commission and the U.S. Christian Commission, as well as in specialized support roles, such as paymasters, engineers, and chemists. At least ten men served in the Confederate forces (a substantially lower percentage than that at Princeton University, then called the College of New Jersey, where more than half its Civil War veterans sided with the Confederacy). And although about one-third of the college's veterans served in New Jersey units, Rutgers men served in the volunteer regiments of at least twenty Northern and Southern states, as well as in regular military units. The youngest to wear a uniform was 15 years-old, while the oldest was at least 58.

The first Rutgers man to enlist and bear arms in defense of the Union during the Civil War was Andrew K. Cogswell, '59, who immediately responded to President Abraham Lincoln's initial call for 75,000 90-day volunteers following the surrender of Fort Sumter. Cogswell had enlisted for active duty in Manhattan's famous 7th New York State Militia. This prestigious unit agreed to drop everything and immediately proceed to beleaguered Washington as New York's military vanguard, in exchange for the government's promise of only 30 days of federal service being

required. On Friday, April 19, 1861—exactly one week after Confederate artillery first fired on Sumter -- Private Cogswell marched down Broadway in lower Manhattan with his regiment, arriving in Washington six days later.

At the very hour Cogswell was preparing to leave for Washington, another Rutgers graduate was at the center of the first hostile bloodshed of the Civil War. George W. Brown, '31, had been elected mayor of Baltimore, Maryland, his native city, in October 1860. In the early afternoon of April 19, he was attempting to quell a large and dangerous mob of Confederate sympathizers, which had attacked the Washington-bound 6th Massachusetts volunteers, another Northern regiment responding to Lincoln's call. Although a number of Union soldiers and private citizens were killed or injured in Baltimore during the attacks, Brown's personal intervention may well have prevented even further casualties.

On the home front, Rutgers-educated clergymen, some long absent from Old Queens, would exhort their congregations to help preserve the Union, sometimes urging the younger members to join Lincoln's forces. On July 1, 1861, Rev. Peter D. Oakey, '41, delivered a forceful sermon at Jamaica, Long Island, titled "The War: its origin, purpose, and our duty respecting it." The widely distributed, 28-page sermon concluded with a clarion call to his congregation: "And therefore in the conscious sense of the righteousness of our cause, we pledge ourselves to the support of the Government, till as in former days, our insulted, but yet upright flag shall again wave over every foot of its rightful territory, the emblem of Justice, Equity, and Liberty." Rev. Oakey later sent his own son South in a blue uniform.



Edward F. Taylor

At the battle of Bull Run, the first major engagement of the war, Edward F. Taylor, '50, surgeon of the 1st NJ Infantry, remained with the

wounded and dying as the Union army withdrew from the field in defeat. On July 21, 1861, Surgeon Taylor thus became New Jersey's first prisoner of war. According to some accounts, he was stripped of his uniform and marched off barefoot at bayonet point to Richmond, where he was said to be among the first Union officers held there.

Rutgers men would later be present at almost every major battle and campaign during the Civil War. They fought at Antietam and Gettysburg, Chickamauga and Chattanooga. They served through the Peninsula Campaign under General George B. McClellan and the Overland Campaign under General Ulysses S. Grant. Rutgers alumni served under General William T. Sherman during his Atlanta, Savannah, and Carolina campaigns, and they rode in General Philip H. Sheridan's cavalry through the Shenandoah Valley. They fought at the first battles of the Civil War, and at the final sieges of Petersburg and Richmond. They were also present at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, when a played-out Army of Northern Virginia under General Robert E. Lee finally surrendered to Grant.

Although there are no known instances where Rutgers family members engaged each other on the battlefield as "brother against brother," divergent regional sympathies between brothers certainly did not preclude the possibility. Charles R. Goodwin, '60, born in Savannah, Georgia, served in the Confederate army as a staff officer to several Southern generals. At the same time, his older brother, Alexander T. Goodwin, '57, also born in Savannah, served as adjutant of the 45th Regiment of the New York State National Guard. Moreover, there were at least two instances where Rutgers men were fighting on opposite sides of the same battle, resulting in the combat deaths of two alumni.

At the Union siege of Port Hudson, Louisiana, Private John McGaffin, '64—who enlisted in the 177th New York Infantry after leaving Rutgers in his junior year—was instantly killed when struck by a Confederate artillery shell on June 18, 1863. At the same time, Lieutenant J. Watts Kearny, '54, was in command of a twenty-pound Parrott gun defending the Confederate stronghold.



Jacob J. Janeway

And on April 6, 1865, Colonel Jacob J. Janeway, '59, was leading the 14th New Jersey Infantry against the rapidly crumbling line of Lee's army at Sailor's Creek, Virginia. Private Alfred O. Bowne, '63, was also there, with the dwindling Confederate troops—starved and exhausted—still resisting an inevitable defeat. Private Bowne, who had left Rutgers to stand with his native Georgia, was mortally wounded that day, making him the last Rutgers fatality of the Civil War. Three days later, General Grant accepted Lee's surrender.



George H. Sharpe

After the surrender, General George H. Sharpe, '47—then serving as provost marshal—issued paroles to all of Bowne's surviving comrades in the Army of Northern Virginia. Sharpe had previously organized and commanded the Union's Bureau of Military Information, predecessor of all modern intelligence organizations. Sharpe's briefing of General George G. Meade at Gettysburg regarding the disposition of Pickett's Division and other Confederate troops on the evening of July 2, 1863, had been instrumental in Meade's decision to stand his ground on Cemetery Ridge the following afternoon.

Three Civil War veterans first enrolled at Rutgers after the conclusion of the war. The last was Madison M. Ball, '73. Ball had fought for three years with the 91st New York infantry in the South. He entered Rutgers in 1869, winning a class prize for oration. His principal legacy at Rutgers, however, would be in the postwar emergence of varsity sports. Madison Ball was a member of the Rutgers team that played the nation's first intercollegiate football game on

November 6, 1869. Rutgers beat Princeton by 6 goals to 4, with the twenty-eight-year-old Ball securing the third goal for Rutgers, putting it ahead in the game. He advanced the score by running in the same direction as a loose ball, and when it was overtaken, stepping over and kicking it behind him with his heel to a well-placed teammate, who easily completed the play. Ball's fancy footwork was all the more remarkable in view of his wartime leg injury received at the battle of Donaldsonville, Louisiana.



Edwin Y. Lansing

The last surviving Civil War veteran of Rutgers College passed away in his ninety-sixth year on April 27, 1937, in Walla Walla, Washington. Edwin Y. Lansing, '61, had left the campus after two years, later accepting a commission as adjutant of the 50th New York Engineers. In 1863, he was commissioned into the 13th New York Cavalry. Lansing served in the Virginia countryside chasing Mosby's Rangers, commanded by the Confederate "Gray Ghost," Colonel John Singleton Mosby. (Captain Lansing would later be promoted to brevet major for his efforts.) Lansing also spent time in the field with author Herman Melville. Melville would later base a wartime poem—"The scout toward Aldie," published in 1866—on these encounters with Lansing and his fellow cavalymen, including the regiment's surgeon, Benjamin R. Taylor, '39.

The contributions made by our state university's alumni during that great struggle were instrumental in bringing about the transformations engendered by the American Civil War. We should be mindful of the part these men played in creating the modern political and social framework of our united states. ♦

The foregoing article was largely based on one published in The Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries (Glazer, S.D. "Rutgers in the Civil War," Vol. 66 (2014), pp. 91-120). It includes an annotated list of all known Rutgers Civil War veterans and is available online at:

<http://jrul.libraries.rutgers.edu/index.php/jrul/article/viewFile/1865/3298>

Cemetery Corner

Continuing our feature where readers can submit one or two paragraphs and a photo of a Civil War veteran's headstone. It's an easy way to get your work in print and give tribute to a CW veteran



Grave of John McGowan

The First Shots of the Civil War

Contributed by Steve Glazer, Lieutenant Colonel, USA (Ret.)

It is conventional wisdom that the first shots fired by the South against the Union in the Civil War were at Charleston Harbor on April 12, 1861, with the target being Fort Sumter. However, here in New Jersey, our state officially takes a different view.

On January 5, 1861, President James Buchanan dispatched the *Star of the West* -- a commercial steamer commanded by U.S. Revenue Marine Captain John McGowan of Elizabeth, New Jersey -- along with 200 regular troops and 90-days supplies, on a covert mission to relieve Fort Sumter.



Star of the West

News of the mission was leaked by Southern sympathizers in Washington, and an artillery battery on Morris Island at the mouth of the harbor was waiting for the appearance of the Union-flagged ship. As the sun rose on January 9, Citadel cadets manning the battery spied the ship and repeatedly fired upon her, with several shots hitting the target, but with little damage.

Major Robert Anderson, commanding Fort

Sumter, hesitated to return the South's fire (with his artillery officer and second in command, then-captain Abner Doubleday, later expressing some regret for the hesitation). McGowan's ship being unarmed, and no fire support coming from the fort, he aborted the mission -- with agreement of the army officers on board -- and headed back to New York harbor.

That afternoon, South Carolina's papers trumpeted the first shots fired against the North, and the following day it was front-page news across the country. Upon McGowan's death in Elizabeth in 1891, his obituary -- run throughout the nation -- reported that he drew the first shots of the Civil War. And many contemporary histories of the war were to the same effect.

In early 2011, a Joint Legislative Resolution was duly and lawfully enacted by our state legislature in Trenton. It reads in part:

January 9, 2011, marks the solemn occasion of the One Hundred Fiftieth Anniversary of the first shots of the Civil War, drawn by Union County Captain John McGowan of Elizabeth ... Through their service, Captain John McGowan and the soldiers aboard the Star of the West brought honor and pride to their country by fighting for the restoration of the Union and in the struggle for the causes of freedom and democracy upon which our nation was founded ... This Legislature hereby acknowledges the One Hundred Fiftieth Anniversary of the first shots of the Civil War, and joins in paying tribute to the memory of Captain John McGowan and his troops.

Some modern histories are in agreement with our state legislature. However, most agree with Civil War historian James McPherson, who wrote in his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Battle Cry of Freedom*, "These could have been the opening shots of a civil war. But they were not -- because Anderson did not fire back."

The grave shown above is located at Evergreen Cemetery in Hillside New Jersey. For more information see : www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=62854005

For the original New York Times article see: www.nytimes.com/1861/01/14/news/capt-mcgowan-s-report-steamship-star-of-the-west.html . ♦

A Black Spy in the Confederate White House

By Lois Leveen



Confederate White House

Mary Bowser, born into slavery in Virginia sometime around 1840, was, alternately, a missionary to Liberia, a Freedmen's school teacher — and, most amazingly, a Union spy in the Confederate White House.

Her wartime career is all the more astounding because her espionage depended on the very institution that was meant to subjugate her. Chattel slavery was predicated on the belief that blacks were innately inferior — leaving a slave woman not so much above suspicion as below it — yet Bowser demonstrated the value of black intelligence, in every sense of the term. But the truth about the woman who went from slave to spy is fascinating and revealing precisely because it remains incomplete.

Bowser began her life as property of the Van Lews, a wealthy, white Richmond family. Although her exact date of birth is unknown, on May 17, 1846, "Mary Jane, a colored child belonging to Mrs. Van Lew," was baptized in St. John's, the stately Episcopal church for which the elegant Church Hill neighborhood of Richmond is named, and in which Patrick Henry delivered his 1775 "give me liberty or give me death" speech. It was extremely rare for enslaved or free blacks to be baptized in this church. Indeed, other Van Lew slaves received baptism at Richmond's First African Baptist Church, indicating that Mrs. Van Lew, the widowed head of the household, and her daughter Bet singled out Mary for special treatment from an early age.

Sometime after being baptized, Mary was sent north to be educated, although it is unclear precisely when or where she attended school. In 1855, Bet arranged for the girl, then using the

name Mary Jane Richards, to join a missionary community in Liberia. According to Bet's correspondence with an official of the American Colonization Society, however, the teenage Mary was miserable in Africa. By the spring of 1860, she returned to the Van Lew household, and eventually to St. John's Church, where, on April 16, 1861 — the day before the Virginia Convention voted to secede — Wilson Bowser and Mary, "colored servants to Mrs. E. L. Van Lew," were married.

As these scant biographical traces suggest, much of what historians have documented about the life of Mary Bowser comes from sources that focus more fully on the Van Lews, especially the pro-Union Elizabeth "Bet" Van Lew. During the Civil War, Bet's loyalty to the North prompted her to care for Federal prisoners in Richmond and to smuggle information to Union military commanders. Although the official military correspondence involving Van Lew's espionage was destroyed at her request after the war, the generals Benjamin Butler, Ulysses S. Grant and George Sharpe all cited Van Lew as a critical source of intelligence from within the Confederate capital.

Van Lew, in turn, credited her family's former slave as her best source, writing in the private diary she kept during the war, "When I open my eyes in the morning, I say to the servant, 'What news, Mary?'" and my caterer never fails! Most generally our reliable news is gathered from negroes, and they certainly show wisdom, discretion and prudence which is wonderful."

But it was not until 1900, when Van Lew was dying, that a Richmond newspaper's account of her life included a description of an unnamed "maid, of more than usual intelligence" who was educated in Philadelphia and then placed in the Confederate White House as part of Van Lew's spy ring. It was another decade before Bet Van Lew's niece identified this black woman as Mary Bowser (sadly, the niece, only 10 years old when the war ended, could provide few other details regarding Bowser). The first publication of Bowser's name came in a June 1911 article in Harper's Monthly about Van Lew, which became the source — usually uncited and heavily embellished — for nearly all subsequent accounts

of Bowser's exploits.

But the former spy had already told her own story, publicly and privately, in the period immediately following the war, as recent research has revealed. Nevertheless, her own accounts don't amount to straightforward autobiography, because she deliberately concealed or altered aspects of her life, as she carefully constructed her own identity and positioned herself in relation to the larger black community.

On Sept. 10, 1865, The New York Times published a notice for a "Lecture by a Colored Lady":

Miss RICHMONIA RICHARDS, recently from Richmond, where she has been engaged in organizing schools for the freedmen, and has also been connected with the secret service of our government, will give a description of her adventures, on Monday evening, at the Abyssinian Baptist Church.

There can be little doubt that this was Bowser. And yet, as the use of a pseudonym suggests, she was consciously constructing a public persona. Reporting on the talk, the New York-based newspaper the Anglo African described Richards as "very sarcastic and ... quite humorous." The audience might have been most amazed by her description of collecting intelligence in the Confederate Senate as well as the Confederate White House, and aiding in the capture of rebel officers at Fredericksburg, Va. But her acerbic wit shone best when she described her time in Liberia, where "the Mendingoes ... never drink, lie, nor steal," making them "much better than the colored people are here." (She concluded by admonishing young people to pay less attention to fashion and more to education.)

Slaves, like spies, regularly relied on judicious deceit. But even with the war over, Bowser, speaking in the guise of Richmonia Richards, practiced deliberate dissimulation. "Richmonia" recounted returning from Liberia to Virginia in 1860 to visit "her foster-sister," whom she referred to as "Miss A—," though the woman in question must have been Bet; it was a convention of sentimental abolitionist literature to use the phrase "foster sister" to describe the relationship between a sympathetic young mistress and her

slave. But Richmonia Richards was more critical. She claimed that because Miss A— confiscated her free papers “for safekeeping,” she was arrested, given five lashes and “finally sold into slavery.” But in truth, although Mary Richards was arrested in Richmond in 1860, rather than being sold, she was returned to Bet’s mother, who was fined for letting her slave go out without a pass.

Why the prevarication? Mary’s freedom was likely *de facto*, not *de jure*, at least until after the war: both Virginia state law and stipulations in her husband’s will impeded Mrs. Van Lew from legally manumitting any of her family slaves. For the teenage Mary, the shock of being openly deemed property after having experienced personal liberty in the North and overseas must have been disturbing. And for “Richmonia,” the specter of whipping and forced sale was rhetorically powerful.

Mary’s twin commitments to racial uplift and to creating a story to suit her audience remained in evidence in 1867, when she met Harriet Beecher Stowe, the Rev. Charles Beecher and the Rev. Crammond Kennedy of the Freedmen’s Bureau. The trio was traveling through St. Mary’s, Ga., when they encountered “a most interesting school taught by a colored girl — quite a character,” who at that time went by the name Mary J. R. Richards. Beecher’s diary entry provides the only known physical description of the slave-turned-spy: “a Juno, done in somber marble ... her features regular and expressive, her eyes exceedingly bright and sharp, her form and movements the perfection of grace.”

As impressed as the travelers were by her efforts as a prewar missionary and postwar teacher of former slaves, it was Bowser’s work as “a member of a secret organisation in Richmond during the war ... a detective of Gen’l Grant,” that prompted Kennedy to muse, “She could write a romance from her experience in that employment.” One wonders what story she would have penned, given that she told these visitors that her father was part Cuban-Spaniard and part Negro, and her mother was white, a dubious claim in light of the social mores of antebellum Virginia and the extant documentation that Mary was born a slave, which the child of a white mother would not have been.

Why lie about her parentage? The answer may stem not from the intentional deceptions she practiced during the war, but what she experienced in its aftermath. During her New York lecture, Richards recounted the arrest, torture and threatened execution of a black man who dared defend his wife from physical attack by Union forces occupying defeated Richmond. And while Kennedy described Richards as “this sister of ours, whose history ... brought tears to all of our eyes,” Beecher referred to another African American in St. Mary’s as an “old darky.” If even seemingly sympathetic white Northerners could express overt racism, disguising one’s heritage might have been a calculated gesture of self-protection.

In the only direct words of hers we have (her 1867 correspondence with the superintendent of education for Georgia’s Freedmen’s Bureau), Mary emphasized the pull of race, expressing deep concern for the millions of slaves she helped liberate: “I felt that I had the advantage over the majority of my race both in Blood and Intelligence, and that it was my duty if possible to work where I am most needed.” After a month as the sole teacher to 70 day students, a dozen adult night students and 100 Sunday school students, however, she despaired, “I am I hope willing to do what I can, but I fear that in the end it will not prove much.”

The slave-turned-spy now faced an especially insidious enemy, as she wrote in one of her last missives before leaving the school and slipping out of the historical record:

“I wish there was some law here, or some protection. I know the southerners pretty well ... having been in the service so long as a detective that I still find myself scrutinizing them closely. There is ... that sinister expression about the eye, and the quiet but bitterly expressed feeling that I know portends evil ... with a little whiskey in them, they dare do anything ... Do not think I am frightened and laugh at my letter. Anyone that has spent 4 months in Richmond prison does not be so easily frightened.”

Despite her repeated concealments and calculated deceptions concerning her past, she drew on her authority as a former intelligence agent. In so

doing, the woman we remember as Mary Bowser anticipated the power her story still holds today. Journalists, historians, even the Military Intelligence Hall of Fame and the C.I.A. have celebrated the extraordinary Mary Bowser, yet most Americans have never heard of her. Women's history and African-American history still garner inadequate attention as fields, even when they intersect with an event as widely studied as the Civil War. And even as skeptics and Confederate apologists (starting with the Confederate first lady, Varina Davis) have denied the possibility of Bowser's espionage, individuals and institutions interested in black history and women's history have repeated unsubstantiated claims about her (for example, that she used the alias Ellen Bond, or that she set fire to the Confederate White House). Even a photograph purportedly of Bowser, widely circulated online, has not been traced to any definitive 19th-century source. It is especially fitting that although the woman in the photograph stares directly at the camera, her features remain obscured.

Bowser depended upon the way her race, gender, and presumed class allowed her to hide in plain sight. A century and a half later, Mary Richards Bowser remains a fascinating yet frustratingly obscured figure in American history. Ultimately, the lessons she offers us may be about the limitations of history, and the power of invention.

Sources: The American Freedman, April 1867; The Anglo African, Oct. 7, 1865; Charles Beecher diary, unpublished holding in the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, Hartford, Conn.; William Gilmore Beymer, "On Hazardous Service"; Rev. L. W. Burton, "Annals of Henrico Parish"; The New York Times, Sept. 10, 1865; Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Georgia Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1870; David D. Ryan, ed., "A Yankee Spy in Richmond: the Civil War Diary of "Crazy Bet" Van Lew"; and Elizabeth Varon "Southern Lady, Yankee Spy: The True Story of Elizabeth Van Lew."

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We hope you have enjoyed the many member contributions in this issue. Please submit some yourself. Explored a battlefield? Seen an interesting museum exhibit? Read a new Civil War book or reread a favorite one? Share your experiences with round table members. **Also, for our new *Where am I?* feature, submit a couple of your own photographs of a favorite Civil War site for other members to try to identify.**

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Jot down a couple of lines and send your photos and your thoughts to the Gazette email address: oldennewsletter@optonline.net. The mailing address is C&M Mazzocchi, 1430 18th Ave. Wall, NJ 07719.

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Answer to "Where Am I"? – Franklin, Tennessee.

Pictures show the Carter House where Tod Carter died shortly after the battle, holes made by musketballs on a nearby out building and Carnton Plantation. On Carnton's back porch four Confederate generals' bodies—Patrick Cleburne, John Adams, Otho F. Strahl and Hiram B. Granbury—were laid out for a few hours after the battle. ♦

Museum Hours

Be sure to visit the *Camp Olden Civil War and Native American Museum* located in Veteran's Memorial Park at 2202 Kuser Rd. in Hamilton, NJ, which is open the 2nd and 3rd full weekends of each month (except January and February) from 1 PM to 4 PM. Remember we do need docents to guide people! Contact Bruce Smith at a meeting or at Bruce0069@aol.com. ♦