

The Dispatch

Newspaper of the

CAPITAL DISTRICT CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

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www.cdcwrt.org



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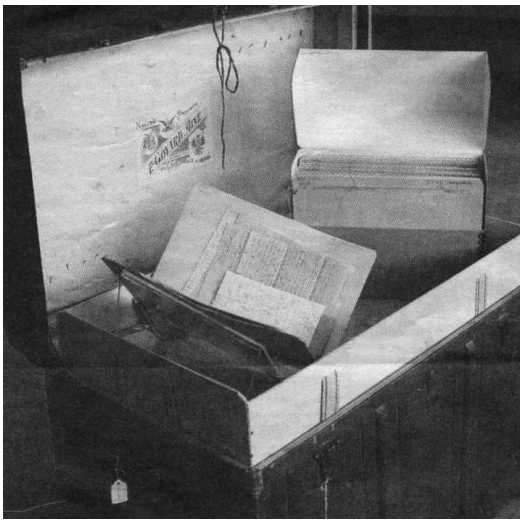
TWO STORIES OF TRUNKS AND LETTERS

MARY CUSTIS LEE



Mary Custis Lee, daughter of Robert E. Lee, was the unofficial family historian, and left a trove of papers and souvenirs in a bank vault in 1917, a year before her death. Historian and author, Elizabeth Brown Pryor stated that the letters found in the trunks show the general was "a very complex, vulnerable, engaging yet troublesome human being."

TRUNKS & EPHEMERA



Did you ever wonder what Robert E. Lee told his family about Antietam? Or whatever happened to Lee's general's stars? The discovery of two trunks in 2002 in a bank vault is detailed inside from a *Washington Post* story. The trunks are with the Virginia Historical Society and the contents will go on display shortly.

DR. JOHN SWINBURNE



Swinburne was a local Civil War physician who wrote about his experiences. Swinburne Park was named after him. This month's speaker, Don Johnson, is an author who is introduced to the letters of Dr. Henry A Drane, which were discovered in an old trunk in an attic in Arlington, Virginia. This eventually led to a historical novel, *Valor Wore a Green Sash.*

SEPTEMBER MEETING
Friday September 14, 2007
Guilderland Library
2228 Western Ave.

THE LIVES OF CIVIL WAR SURGEONS

SOCIAL HOUR	**6:00-7:00 PM**
BUSINESS	**7:00-7:30 PM**
PRESENTATION	**7:30-8:30 PM**
DISCUSSION	**8:30 – 9:00 PM**

CDCWRT MEETING

The MONTHLY meeting of the CDCWRT will be held at the Guilderland Library on Friday, SEPTEMBER 14, 2007. Our guest speaker will be author, Don Johnson, and his talk is entitled, **"Insight into the Lives and Times of Civil War Surgeons."**

Don retired as a Mission Manager with the NASA Space Program after a twenty-five year career. He has spent the past fourteen years as a Park Ranger and Historian at several historical sites and Civil War battlefields, including Manassas, Gettysburg and Wilson's Creek. His writing accomplishments include published professional papers and several award winning literary history articles in the **Washington Times, Civil War Times Illustrated, Columbiad, and CWPT's Hallowed Ground.** ***Several of these have dealt with Civil War paintings and cycloramas.***

His first historical novel is entitled, " **Valor Wore a Green Sash."** ***The presentation will highlight the Civil War experiences of two doctors and the discovery of their letters, which led to the publication of Mr. Johnson's book. This material is not covered in the book itself. Don will have copies of his book for a book signing after the question and answer period.***

MONTHLY MEETING

There was a large crowd of 70 on hand at the June meeting of the Round Table to hear Patrick Schroeder, historian at Appomattox Court House National Historical Park. Patrick spoke about the myths around Lee's surrender. Patrick did his best to answer the many questions from the audience afterwards.

BOARD MEETING

June marked the last Board Meeting of the program year. There were no meetings scheduled for July and August, but the new program year will begin with the September meeting. The treasurer's report noted $1326.88 in the regular operational account, and $4973.30 in the preservation account. The Peterboro Civil War event netted $476. The Board discussed upcoming events in the fall, including a picnic.

The first meeting of the Board for the new program year was on August 20th where it was announced that the Round Table grossed $4349 in Gettysburg and $4133 in Cooperstown by the sale of postal cachets, T-shirts, postal art and Induction Day memorabilia. Matt George added $150, which he received as an honorarium from the Wilmington Historical Society. The treasurer announced that there was $1286.04 in the regular account and $12,763.49 in the preservation account. The proposed schedule for the rest of the year was discussed.

UP-COMING EVENTS

The 100th anniversary of the 1907 41st National GAR Convention will be celebrated on September 7-9th at Congress Park in downtown Saratoga Springs. The 125th NYVI from Troy will be skirmishing with the 61st Virginia on Saturday the 8th, and there will be a parade to the cemetery on Sunday the 9th. A Vermont artillery unit will also be present. Saratoga in the early fall is beautiful. The racing crowds are gone. The Military Museum has new exhibits. Members are encouraged to see the 125th in encampment.

On Friday, September 14th and Saturday, September 15th, the Irish Fest will be held at the Altamont Fairgrounds. This will be a two-day event this year and is another opportunity to raise money for preservation. Volunteers are needed to staff our booth. Please contact Sue Knost or Lew

Warner.

The Annual Albany Rural Cemetery Civil War Event will be held on Friday, September 28th and Saturday, September 29th. This has become a two-day event with a number of groups participating, including the CDCWRT, the Sons of Union Veterans, and the 125th NYSVI re-enactors. The Round Table will have a **PICNIC on Friday afternoon at 3:30pm in the Cemetery. This was a typical event for families in the 19th Century. Please join us. Tents and a building will be available incase of inclement weather.** The Round Table will supply hamburgers, hot dogs, soda and other items. Members are asked to bring a favorite salad or dessert to share. **Please call Noreen Underhill at 371-4342 to indicate what you are bringing, or to seek suggestions on what to bring.**

October 5-8th marks the Fall Trip to Gettysburg. The theme will be, "The Battle Plan –Did the Plan Remain Unchanged?" Our own Stacy Kilts, battlefield guide in-training, will set the stage for the battle on Friday afternoon. Author, Scott Mingus will talk at the Friday night banquet at the Dobbin House about the roads to Gettysburg and John B. Gordon's raid in Pennsylvania.

On Saturday, licensed battlefield guides, Dr. Charlie Fennell and Col. (ret) Kavin Coughenhour, will take us through July 2nd. Charlie will examine the Union position, the Meade-Sickles plan, and command problems on the Union side. His battle walk is entitled, **"Battle Plan – Rarely Was the Battle Fought."** Kavin will lead us on **"Longstreet's Countermarch,"** and will explore the point where there was no alternative but to attack the left flank of the Union army. Other guides will join us throughout the weekend. There will be time to see the Visitor Center, the Eisenhower Farm or to shop

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BECAUSE THE TRIP IS A GO AND THE BUS IS RESERVED, WE CAN TAKE ADDITIONAL RESERVATIONS FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS. ANYONE INTERESTED MUST TALK TO SUE KNOST OR FRAN McCASHION NOW, AND DEPOSIT $425 IMMEDIATELY. THE SEPTEMBER MEETING IS THE FINAL DEADLINE.

The October meeting of the CDCWRT will be held on Friday, October 12th. Our guest speaker will be Richard N. Griffin. Last year he published his first book, entitled ***Three Years a Soldier,*** which is based on his great-grandfather's Civil War diary and correspondence. His relative served in the 6th New York Independent Battery.

On Friday, November 9th, Round Table member, Mark Silo, will talk about the 150th NYSVI. He has been working on a book for sometime now, and it is being released in November. This is very exciting for everyone. Few round tables can boast two authors. Our RT has John Hennessey, and now, Mark Silo.

November 17th and 18th mark Remembrance Day Weekend in Gettysburg. This marks the 144th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address. This weekend generally hosts the largest re-enactor crowd of the year. The RT has some motel rooms available but they go quickly. Contact Sue Knost.

MISCELLANEOUS

MARY CUSTIS LEE'S LOST TRUNKS

Although Northern newspapers carried little about this news item, the Washington Post and other Southern papers highlighted the following story.

In 1917, Mary Custis Lee, the oldest and unwed daughter of Robert E. Lee, stored two wooden trunks in the silver vault of the Burke & Herbert Bank & Trust of Alexandria, Virginia. She died one year later at the age of 83. The trunks remained unclaimed in the vault until 2002 when Hunt Burke, the bank's vice-chairman, discovered them. He called his old high school classmate, Rob E. L. deButts Jr., who was the great-great grandson of Lee. The trunks were opened and revealed ca priceless cache of 4000 letters, photographs and documents.

DeButts carted the collection to the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond, which houses the largest collection of Lee papers. One of the most exciting finds was an envelope containing three cloth stars --- general's stars ---that Lee cut off his Confederate uniform after he surrendered at Appomattox. There's a list of 266 slaves owned by

one of her ancestors in 1766. There is an account book kept by her mother's step-great-grandfather, George Washington. There's a handful of letters Gen. Lee wrote to his daughter during the Civil War. On Christmas Day 1861, Lee wrote to Mary.

"Having distributed such poor Xmas gifts as I had to those around me, I have been looking for something for you. I send you some sweet violets that I gathered for you this morning while covered with dense white frost that glistened in the bright sun like diamonds and formed a broche of rare beauty and sweetness, which could not be fabricated by the expenditure of a world of money. Yet how little it will purchase. But see how God provides for our pleasure in every way. May he guard and preserve you for me, my dear daughter. Among the calamities of war the hardest to bear perhaps is the separation of families and friends."

It is a sweet, sentimental letter, but when he brings up a painful subject – the fact that the Union Army has occupied their estate, Arlington --- his anger is palpable.

"Your old home if not destroyed by our enemies has been so desecrated that I cannot bear to think of it. I should have preferred it to have been wiped from the earth, its beautiful hill sunk, its sacred trees burned rather than to have been degraded by the presence of those who revel in the ill they do for their own selfish purposes."

On September 23, 1862, a few days after the battle of Antietam, he wrote to Mary. "We had two hard fought battles in Maryland and did not consider ourselves beaten as our enemies supposed, …We were greatly outnumbered and opposed by double if not treble our strength and yet we repulsed all their attacks, held our ground and retired when it suited our convenience."

Elizabeth Brown Pryor was the first historian to see the letters in the trunk. She also has had access to many of the letter collections in the Lee family. "He's a marvelous letter-writer – expressive, lusty, funny, charming. He is a very complex, vulnerable, engaging yet troublesome human being. You have a very real, emotional person who's writing these letters." She has included some of the letters from the trunk in her new book, "Reading the Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee Through His Private Letters."

Lee was far less sanguine two months later, when he wrote to Mary after learning that his daughter Anne had died of typhoid fever at the age of 23. "In the quiet hours of night when there is nothing to lighten the full weight of my grief, I feel as if I should be overwhelmed. I had always counted, if God should spare me for a few days of peace after this civil war has ended, that I should have her with me. But year after year my hopes go out and I must be resigned."

Pryor is the only historian who has read a batch of letter that Lee wrote to his fiancée, Mary Anna Randolph Custis, before the young Army engineer married the rich great-granddaughter of Martha Washington in 1831. At the request of the Lee family, those letters have not been opened to the public, but they may be available in a year or two.

Buried deep in one of the trunks was a letter that Selina Gray, a former slave at Arlington, wrote to Robert E. Lee's widow, the woman who once had owned her. It is one of several letters to reveal the complex relationship between the Lees and African Americans. "Mrs. Lee, I received your letter and was happy to hear from you, and I was hoping to see you once more at Arlington. The place has changed so you would hardly know it. Your things at the time of the war was taken away by every body so the officers would have them in their tents and all over the ground … the book case that you speak of I cannot tell you any thing of it. I don't remember seeing it since you left. I suppose it was carried off like everything else."

After the war, the Union Army allowed hundreds of former slaves to settle on the Lee plantation. More than 16,000 Union soldiers were also buried around the Lee mansion. Gray wrote, "The whole of it is rented to the freemen. They have little huts all over that beautiful place." Then she added in a postscript, "This piece of green item and this rose bud I send you is some that you planted at your mother's grave."

Also included in the trunk were paper related to June 13, 1902, when Mary Custis Lee was arrested in Alexandria. She was sitting in the African-

American portion of a streetcar, when the conductor told her to move. She refused several times. She was taken to the police station, but when they discovered whom she was, she was released. The arrest made news worldwide. One newspaper reported that she refused to move because her luggage was too heavy, but another because she was sitting with her black maid. The full story is not known, but this might be a reversed Rosa Parks forerunner.

MORE MISCELLANEOUS

How do you keep alive interest in the Civil War? The most obvious way is your support of the CDCWRT in the form of dues and attendance at meetings. Some of you buy our postal cachets, books and t-shirts. Some of you come on trips to see the very spots where events occurred. A number of our members talk to other groups.

Matt George will be talking about the life of the Civil War soldier to the Guilderland AARP in October, the Fulton County Historical Society in November, and the Charlton Historical Society in February. This is in addition to his presentations to eight-graders when they study the Civil War. Sue Knost organizes our tours and hobnobs with the "Whitneys" of the Civil War world such as Ed Bearss, John Hennessey, Jeff Shaara and Charlie Fennell. Rosemary Nichols is working with the Industrial Gateway to explore Troy getting its own life-sized Monitor. These are just a few of the things going on in our area.

But you can help further. Bring a friend to a meeting. Don't be ashamed to bring up discussion about the Civil War when it is pertinent to today's discussions of politics, the military or the government. Talk to young people about Civil War history. They are fascinated by it, and God knows our schools often fail to nurture that spark of interest in history.

And by the way, if you bought a sheet of the 20 Civil War stamps that was issued in 1995, it cost you $6.40. Mystic Stamp Co. of Newark, NY recently took over Fleetwood Stamp Co. Mystic advertises that same sheet for $49.00. That's a 766% increase in value over 12 years. The Civil War can be profitable for you also!

When I was participating in Clarksville Day as a representative of the CDCWRT, an older couple approached me and inquired if I knew anyone who might be interested in military items. I asked them to send me a list of their collection that they would like to sell. Items from the Civil War include cavalry gauntlet gloves, Union belt buckle, a soldier's thimble, Minnie balls from various battlefields, some canister, and a cannon ball. They also have some World War I items, including a complete set of puttees, a money belt, and a bait holder from fishing therapy for wounded soldiers. Anyone interested should call Dolores Zeh at 872-2062.

THE GETTYSBURG MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

As many of you may know, the Visitor Center and Cyclorama Building at Cemetery Hill are slated to be demolished later this fall. The area will be restored to the landscape that existed at the time of the battle. The present Visitor Center was a private home until just before the Centennial of the Civil War in1961. The home was purchased by the National Park Service and has been expanded piecemeal some fifteen times over the ensuing years. It was crowded, had limited exhibit space for the enormous collection owned by NPS, and has been environmentally inadequate, as well as inadequate in bathroom facilities for the two million visitors each year.

The new Visitor Center and Museum is being finished about one mile away in an area that was occupied by the Reserve Artillery at the time of the battle. There will be theaters, exhibit areas, a resource center, an enlarged bookstore, a dining area, a vending machine area, and adequate parking. The themes of the museum's 11 galleries are based on phrases within Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Gallery 1 – Impact of War: "In a Larger Sense."
A stirring juxtaposition of the consequences of the Civil War: Death and Destruction, Emancipation and Union. This gallery serves as a stepping stone to the overall museum experience.

Gallery 2 – Causes of War 1776-1861: "Conceived in Liberty?" Here visitors will begin to absorb the impressions of two conflicting realities: human freedom versus human bondage, from the birth of the nation to the brink of the Civil War. Who are the 'we' in 'We the People?'

Gallery 3 - Approach to War: "A New Nation." This gallery outlines the major issues that tore the country apart. Topics include slavery and its effect on our nation's westward expansion, South Carolina's secession, and the formation of the Confederacy. Visitors will 'meet' Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis.

Gallery 4 – Civil War 1861-1863: "Now We Are Engaged in a Great Civil War." This gallery covers the War from 1861 to June 1863, the point where Lee began his Gettysburg Campaign. Depicted here are recruitment, training, and the live of a soldier

Gallery 5 – Campaign to Pennsylvania: "Testing Whether that Nation Can Long Endure." This gallery closely examines the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of the Potomac, focusing on when Lee decided to take the war North. Audio readings of letters, diaries and newspaper articles provide glimpses into the mindsets of men and women, white and black, young and old, Confederate and Union.

Gallery 6 – Battle of Gettysburg: "Now We Are Met on a Great Battlefield of That War." This gallery is the heart of the museum. It is divided into five sections: Into Battle, Day 1, Day 2, Day 3, and Out of Battle.

Gallery 7 – The Aftermath of Battle: "The Brave Men Living and Dead." This gallery discusses the aftermath of this enormous battle, its impact on the town of Gettysburg, the experience of the wounded men and Civil War medicine, what happened to the men who died, the task of burial, and the fate of prisoners.

The Voices of the Aftermath Theater, located within Gallery 7, relays the stirring accounts of the commanders, common soldiers, civilians and correspondents, as they survey the damage and describe their harrowing situations.

Gallery 8 – The Gettysburg Address: "A New Birth of Freedom." This gallery is solely focused on the monumental importance of the Gettysburg Address. Here, a two-minute audio presentation of the speech is presented in a dedicated listening space, activated by a motion sensor. An interactive computer will help visitors interpret the text of the Gettysburg Address, and exhibits show the reaction from both the North and the South to Lincoln's speech.

Gallery 9 – Civil War 1863-1865: "The Great Task Remaining Before Us." The battle was over but the war raged on. This gallery covers the period from Gettysburg to Appomattox, with the second of the two large projected maps, complete with graphics and audio, showing troop movements and exhibits detailing the story of the final years of the war, the 1864 Election and its consequences, the surrender at Appomattox and Lincoln's assassination.

Gallery 10 – Results of War: "That These Dead Shall Not Have Died in Vain." The centerpiece of this gallery is a ten-minute film that will give the visitors and understanding of what the war settled – the end of slavery and the preservation of the Union – and what it did not – the full rights of citizenship for all Americans. The film also follows or nation's progress from the end of the Civil War, through Reconstruction and up until the 50th anniversary of the battle.

Gallery 11 – Preservation of the Battlefield: "Never Forget What They Did Here." Gallery 11 focuses on the preservation of the battlefield, discussing how land was set aside almost immediately, and describing the journey toward designation as a National Military Park. Battle reunions are also highlighted. Visitors will be able to locate and interpret the monuments on the battlefield by using the gallery's interactive monument database.

Gallery 12 – Special Exhibits Gallery. This space will be filled with temporary or traveling exhibits, broadening the number of topics covered in the museum and encouraging repeat visitation. The Gilder Lehman Institute of American History will loan items from its extensive collection for display in this gallery.

Close to two million visitors come to Gettysburg each year. The new museum and visitor center will make the Gettysburg experience more engaging and informative for everyone. Other features include:

Orientation Theater:
This is an initial three-minute video explaining the entire Gettysburg experience. Visitors will get a clear outline of all they can see and do within the museum, on the battlefield and in the town.

Banking Center:
In addition to the convenience of an on-site ATM, the visitor center combines this service with an interpretive opportunity, based on the world of banking and money during the Civil War.

Feature Film:
This is a new 25-minute feature film that will dramatically immerse the audience in the sights, sound and emotions of the periods before, during and after the battle. During peak periods, two theaters will be used. The stages will also accommodate live performances and lectures during the evenings and periods of lighter visitations.

Ford Motor Company Fund Education Center:
Two state-of-the-art indoor classrooms will provide much-needed space for classroom use, teacher workshops and distance learning programs.

Resource Center:
This center will be open to the public. Visitors can use the center to access digital information related to the Civil War, the Gettysburg Campaign, and the preservation of the Gettysburg Battlefield and creation of Gettysburg National Military Park. They will have access to materials presented in the museum's galleries, including details on the soldiers whose faces can be seen on the "Wall of Casualties" in the Battle of Gettysburg galleries.

Group Entrance Lobby:
This dedicated entrance will give both adult and student groups easy access to buses and streamlined entry into the museum, theater and Cyclorama experiences. On entry, groups will encounter a large topographical map, which will give them a visual overview of the entire battlefield.

Refreshment Saloon and Ding Terrace:
Both modern and Civil War ear foods will be available. There will be an outdoor eating area where visitors can enjoy their own picnics.

Bookstore and Museum Shop:
There will be a much-expanded bookstore and museum gift shop, including audio and video recordings, collectibles and gifts, home accent pieces, and educational products.

Philippoteaux's Cyclorama Painting
The 1884 365-foot circular painting of Pickett's Charge is being restored and cleaned. The new Gettysburg Cyclorama experience includes recreation of the original skyline, the canopy and the three-dimensional diorama that have been missing for more than 40 years.

Curatorial Center, Collection Storage, Library:
There are more than 38,000 historical artifacts and 700,000 documents, maps and photographs that will be stored and displayed in a manner that will help ensure their existence for generations to come. In the library there are approximately 6,800 volumes, including over 800 rare books. These will now be open to park employees, scholars, researchers, and the general public on an appointment basis.

