



# The Dispatch



Newsletter of the

**Capital District Civil War Round Table**

P.O. Box 8874, Albany, NY 12208

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## A Regiment of Heroes: The Orange Blossoms

by  
Charles J. LaRocca

The 124th New York Infantry Regiment, organized in neighboring Orange County to our south, was one of Fox's Fighting Three Hundred Regiments. Using a Christa McAuliffe Grant, teacher Charles J. LaRocca edited *This Regiment of Heroes*, a compilation of primary documents concerning the 124th New York. Mr. LaRocca's presentation will center around the regiment's baptism to battle at Chancellorsville. He has edited a special edition of *The Red Badge of Courage* annotated with letters of members of the 124th New York which will be published soon.

The action of the Orange Blossoms at Chancellorsville may have served as a model for Stephen Crane's classic novel. (See related article by Charles LaRocca in this issue of the Dispatch).

### CDCWRT CALENDAR

- ⇨ **October 14** -- *A Regiment of Heroes: The Orange Blossoms*. Charles J. LaRocca speaks about the 124th NY Infantry Regiment from Orange County.
- ⇨ **October 15** -- Family History Day. State Archives, Cultural Education Center, Madison Ave., Albany.
- ⇨ **November 19** -- Fall Banquet, Italian American Community Center, Washington Ave. Extension, Albany.

### OCTOBER MEETING

**Friday, October 14, 1994**  
Bethlehem Public Library  
Delaware Avenue, Delmar, NY

Doors Open: 7:00 PM  
Program Begins: 7:30 PM



### Dues, Dues, Dues!!!!

Don't forget to renew your membership. Your membership expiration date is on the mailing label of each month's *Dispatch*. Membership is still a bargain at \$15. Send check to CDCWRT, PO Box 8874, Albany, NY 12208.

# 'Orange Blossoms' Remember Crane's 'Red Badge of Courage'

by

Charles LaRocca, Captain Co. A, 124th NYSV

Source: October 1994 Civil War News

[Note: Charles LaRocca is scheduled to speak at our October 14th meeting]

When Stephen Crane wrote *The Red Badge of Courage* one hundred years ago, he had never been in a battle and had not served in any army. Lacking this firsthand experience, he was still able to capture the feeling of what it was like to actually participate in combat so accurately that some Civil War veterans were sure that the young author had been one of them.

Despite the fact that Crane was born in 1871, six years after the war ended, one veteran even claimed to have served with the author at Antietam.

On two occasions this summer, members of the 124th New York State Volunteers, the famed "Orange Blossoms," have been present to commemorate what many consider to be the greatest war story yet produced by an American author.

The novel has a special interest to the members of the regiment because Crane based much of the action of the fictitious 304th New York on the actions of the historic 124th New York at the Battle of Chancellorsville.

The first of these summer events was a living history encampment at Veterans Memorial Park, Port Jervis, Orange County, N.Y. The members of the regiment were eager to be on this particular spot because according to local tradition, Crane, who grew up in Port Jervis, often visited the park to talk to the Civil War veterans who gathered there in the shadow of the imposing monument to the citizens of the town who went off to war.

Some speculate that it was from these old veterans that Crane gained his unique perspective on the war. Many of the soldiers were "Orange Blossoms" who would no doubt have been only too happy to recount their exploits at Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Spotsylvania and Petersburg.

Chancellorsville especially interested Crane. It was the defining moment for the regiment; nearly half were casualties in this, their first real encounter with the enemy; although Chancellorsville was a Union defeat, the regiment did well. Just prior to the battle, Col. Augustus Van Horne Ellis, commander of the 124th, had orange ribbons issued to the regiment as a mark of distinction intended to raise morale but also for easy identification of dead and wounded comrades.

He also used the sobriquet "Orange Blossoms" for the first time when he called upon them to charge and retake the abandoned artillery works at Fairview. The local Orange County newspapers picked up on the nickname and from then on, the regiment has been known by it.

Stephen Crane, sitting in the park listening to the old veterans, must have been impressed because just as the historic 124th charged the enemy twice at Chancellorsville, so too did the fictitious 304th charge the enemy twice in his novel.

At a second event, the members of the reenactment group participated in the centennial of the Goshen Public Library and Historical Society. The theme of the celebration centered around the year 1894, the same year that Crane was busy writing *The Red Badge of Courage*.

Lt. Mel Johnson of the 124th New York presented a dramatic reading of *The Veteran*, a short story written by Crane shortly after the publication of his novel, which was clearly intended to add more to the story of Pvt. Henry Fleming, the main character. In *The Veteran* Crane identified Chancellorsville as the battle depicted in the novel

and gave several other clues that link the 124th and the fictitious 304th.

Even the title of the novel links the two regiments; any Civil War veteran knew that the red badge was the famous red diamond "Kearny Badge" which was adopted by members of the 124th New York after the Battle of Gettysburg.

There is evidence that the "Orange Blossoms" wore the Kearny Badge right to the end of the war, defying orders to remove it in favor of the trefoil badge of the Second Corps to which they were transferred in 1864. The red diamond also figured prominently in the design of their post-war reunion ribbons and medals.

## ***Disney Gives Up on Haymarket Site!***

### **An Abrupt Reversal**

In a startling "development", Disney has decided to abandon their plans to build a huge \$650 million history theme park four miles from the Manassas Battlefield. Two Disney officials notified Virginia Governor George Allen at about 6:00 PM on Wednesday September 28th of Disney's decision to seek another location for the park. Disney indicated they still consider Virginia to be the preferred site for the park and are looking to work with Virginia officials to search for another location.

Although the proposed 3,000 acre site was only a fraction of the size of the Disneyworld property in Florida, it was to be a huge project by most everyone's standards. The park was expected to draw 30,000 visitors daily and was to include 1.9 million square feet of retail shopping space, 1,500 hotel rooms, and more than 2,000 homes. The plan was for construction to begin in 1995 and for the park to open in 1998. Haymarket Va., population 500, is surrounded by rural farmland today.

### **The Support**

Disney's decision was particularly surprising given that just the week before they had won support for its rezoning plans from the county's Planning Commission. A regional group had also just approved a package of road improvements to support the park. Although opposition appeared to be building, signs pointed toward approval of the project with most of the state's politicians lining up in support, including Democratic incumbent Charles Robb, Republican Oliver North, as well as independent candidates Marshall Coleman and Douglas Wilder. Disney had hired former White House press secretary Jody Powell to direct the park's public relations.

Governor George Allen was one of the project's biggest supporters. Allen had pushed through the state legislature \$165 million for road improvements and for a visitor's center at the park. Allen predicted the park would mean \$47 million in new tax revenues annually and 19,000 new jobs to Virginia.

Prince William County has the state's highest real-estate tax rates and Northern Virginia's lowest ratio of jobs to residents (38 jobs for every 100 residents). The project's promise of jobs and added tax revenue was especially enticing to the county.

### **The Opposition**

Some of the most vocal opposition to the project emanated from the wealthy landowners who live near Haymarket. Mellon bank heir Paul Mellon, candy tycoon Forrest Mars, actor Robert Duvall, political talk show host Mary Matalin, Democratic political consultant James Carvill, and several other wealthy members of the Singer and du Pont families joined in their condemnation of the proposed project. Their arguments included a strong Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) sentiment.

Historian Shelby Foote, New York Times columnist Russell Baker, columnist and political commentator George Will, and Civil War documentary filmmaker Ken Burns decried the ersatz historical nature of the project and the negative impact the park would have on the nearby battlefields. The Federal government voiced opposition to widening roads running through the Manassas Battlefield. Many raised concerns about the effects of increased traffic (turning Interstate 66 into a huge parking lot) in a region that is already plagued by incredible traffic and air pollution problems. About a week before the decision to abandon the Haymarket site, over 1,000 opponents of the project marched on the U.S. Capital, where speakers called Disney a "cultural strip miner," and branded the project "a Trojan mouse."

### **The Fallout**

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Disney was blasted by many of the project's supporters after announcing their decision to abandon the Haymarket site. Governor Allen apparently was miffed at the way in which Disney announced their abrupt change in direction -- no negotiations took place, just an announcement. General Assembly delegate Vince Callahan of McLean, commented: "The precipitous way Disney did it, I think, was disgraceful. (Governor Allen) went to the wall for them, and they cut his legs right out from under him." County officials were "stunned and disappointed." Prince William County Executive James T. Mullen said: "We didn't have any inkling of this."

Doug Robarchek, staff writer for the Charlotte Observer, commented on October 3rd:

"Many observers thought the whole idea of a Civil War theme park was ill-conceived, especially with such attractions as 'Andersonville Land,' 'Reconstruction Land,' 'World-O'-Slavery,' 'The Amputation Vacation' and the 'Shoot Your Brother' ride.

France's Euro Disney is a disappointment, with questionable attractions like 'Mr. Frog's Wild Surrender,' 'Collaborator World' and 'Rudenessland,' and there is a feeling the Disney may have lost its touch.

In question now are other planned Disney parks, such as Love Canal Kingdom, with its centerpiece ride, 'Mutants of the Caribbean'; San Andreas Epcot, with its 'Epi-Center' ride ('Hang on, here's another of our Fake Quakes -- or is it?'); and Poltergeist Park ('Right over a holy burial ground').

An editorial in the October 6, 1994 Richmond Times-Dispatch saw the failure to move ahead with the project as just another indication of serious problems in the state of Virginia and warned of much graver consequences of the failure to move ahead with the project. The failed Disney project was linked to a host of other recent development failures in Virginia. Virginia's lack of success was contrasted with Carolina's recent success in using incentives to lure new businesses to locate in the state. The editorial warned: "Indeed, the entire Virginia Piedmont may have been closed to the development it requires to keep its land taxes from soaring into the blue....Henceforward, not only will corporations and governments not be able to do business as they have heretofore. Major projects will have to negotiate an odd obstacle course overseen by posturing and preening obstructionists threatening them with suits and federal decrees -- even with arguments that they will sanitize and trivialize history, and sully sacred ground."

The editorial also attacked the project's opponents for being outsiders who were impinging on the sovereignty of the local people:

A curious coalition consisting of enviros, dilettantes, Hollywood types, the rich, and miscellaneous outsiders carried the day -- thus empowering opponents of such undertakings as never before. Perhaps The New York Times put it best, in a gloating after-

the-fact editorial. Disney's America, it said, ' would have flooded one of America's most historic and scenic regions . . . with traffic and tacky development.' And: 'The Manassas countryside is not Virginia's to sell. It belongs to the nation.'

Said Haymarket's Mayor John Kapp: Many of the opponents 'don't live in Prince William County and don't pay taxes in Prince William County, yet they are dictating to the county. And it's not right.'

### **The Competition Begins**

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Now that the Haymarket site is out of the picture, competition for a new site is heating up. The very next day after the Disney announcement, a spokesman for Maryland Governor William Donald Schaefer was quoted in the Baltimore Sun saying "I would expect that (Maryland) state officials would attempt to contact Disney very soon to understand what this decision might mean for Maryland. . . . we would welcome the opportunity to talk to (Disney) about a Maryland site."

Two days after the announcement, the Norfolk Ledger-Star quoted North Carolina Department of Commerce spokeswoman Angie Harris as stating: We are certainly interested. We have had some general conversations with Walt Disney Co. and we certainly are going to make another effort." Several sources were cautious about getting into a bidding war with incentives to lure Disney to North Carolina -- apparently the state was still trying to evaluate the effectiveness of granting large incentives to Mercedes Benz to locate a new car manufacturing facility in North Carolina. John Goode, Bentonville site manager commented:

I'm certain that there are areas within the state that would benefit from a Disney theme park. But I certainly would not welcome it near this battleground. It would be in extremely poor taste.

On October 3, 1994 The Norfolk Virginian-Pilot reported that West Virginia's Governor Gaston Caperton was courting Disney to locate in his state. A district service officer for the American Legion Post in Martinsburg was supportive of a West Virginia location but warned against locating the park near Harper's Ferry.

The next day, October 4, the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot featured an article about the efforts of North Carolina to lure Disney to Eastern North Carolina. State Representative Howard Hunter Jr., D-Northampton, said: "We are pursuing it aggressively. . . . Bringing Disney to the area would put us 20 years ahead in terms of economic development."

### **Summary**

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Stay tuned -- the issue may not "be history".

• **MARK YOUR CALENDARS!** •

## **Fall Banquet Saturday, November 19, 1994**

Where: Italian American Community Center  
(Room D)

Cocktail Hour: 6:30 -- 7:30

Dinner: 7:30

Choice of Chicken Marsala, Baked Scrod, or Veal Parmigiana for the entree, and ice cream cake roll w/chocolate sauce for dessert.

\$22.50 per person.

Reservations and/or Questions: Kathy Silo,  
24 Cortland Drive, Loudonville, NY  
12211 (Phone: 786-1511)

Created in 1984, the Capital District Civil War Round Table is an incorporated non-profit educational organization. Meetings are held monthly at the Bethlehem Public Library in Delmar, New York. This newsletter is published ten times per year. Annual dues are \$15. The purpose of the organization is to promote, educate, and further stimulate interest in, and discussion of, all aspects of the Civil War period.



To join or renew membership, send \$15 to the CDCWRT address below.

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