

On Richmond's FRONT LINE

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Monuments on Richmond's Battlefields

As most students of Civil War battlefields know, the veterans who erected monuments to their units in the postwar years often did so in response to other memorials. The veterans' motives varied, of course, but very frequently they raised granite markers for their regiments not to commemorate a specific event so much as to ensure that their contributions were not omitted. Once monuments appeared at places like Vicksburg, Gettysburg, Shiloh and Sharpsburg, nearly every organization of veterans felt compelled to mark their own position and add their stone to the forest of granite.

This unbridled proliferation at a few prominent sites naturally meant that many of the other battlefields enjoyed less commemorative attention. Even famous places like Manassas, Cold Harbor, Chancellorsville, and the Petersburg area battlefields are relatively barren of nineteenth century granite. The absence of a War Department presence at those privately owned places also made it less convenient for interested parties to acknowledge specific units, individuals, or events. This contrast is especially noticeable on Richmond's battlefields, particularly in light of the intensity and density of the actions there in 1862 and 1864. This issue of the

RBA newsletter will devote some space to the stories of the few markers that exist on the battlefields we are pledged to protect.

It is almost certain that the first substantial battlefield marker outside Richmond stood near

field, boys." His men honored that wish, and when Wheat's sister reached the battlefield in July 1862, she contented herself with erecting "a small marble headstone" over his grave. Time soon proved that it was not possible to protect the marker from souvenir hunters, and the family subsequently removed Wheat's remains to Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond. There are no known photographs or sketches of the marble marker, which must have been one of the very first of its kind on any Civil War battlefield. Perhaps its base still survives, awaiting discovery on the battlefield.

Another little known and now destroyed marker stood on the Seven Pines battlefield. Veterans of the 100th New York Infantry, anxious to remember their role in that desperate fight, journeyed to Richmond in 1912. At Seven Pines they found that the farmer who owned the portion of the battlefield where they fought was favorably disposed toward their plan. It was not much of a monument, as the accompanying photograph shows: merely a "pine board, with cleats at the ends, painted white, with black letters, nailed to a cedar post 10 feet to the left of the



A veteran of the 100th New York "unveils" his unit's humble marker on the Seven Pines battlefield.

Boatswain's Creek on the Gaines's Mill battlefield. Charismatic major Chatham R. Wheat, commanding his famous Louisianians at that battle as part of General Richard S. Ewell's division, fell killed in the woods just after crossing the creek. His final command, widely reported at the time, was "Bury me on the

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Anonymous Bequest

The board of directors recently learned of an outstanding piece of generosity that has no precedent in the Richmond Battlefield Association's relatively short history. A donor has contacted the organization and announced plans to earmark \$75,000 as a will bequest to RBA, to benefit Richmond's battlefields.

The RBA will be responsible for applying that money toward some

local battlefield project. The only caveat is that the money go directly toward land in Hanover County. Both Gaines's Mill and Cold Harbor lie within that historic county--each imperiled by Richmond's sprawl--and it seems almost certain that the bequest money will go toward saving land at one of those two famous battlefields.

As the RBA grows, its leader-

ship certainly will change, as will its membership. Perhaps some of us may not be around when this bequest comes due, but some of the battlefields will still be here, undoubtedly needing our help. This far-sighted arrangement is a tremendous thing that we can appreciate now, and which the endangered battlefields will enjoy later.

Monuments (contd.)

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Williamsburg road...." Although this happened only 92 years ago, the monument is long gone. The property where it once stood is completely obliterated.

Another monument of interest survives at the northern tip of the Cold Harbor battlefield. It marks the area near Hundley's Corner where four companies of the 36th Wisconsin Infantry (of John Gibbon's division) were destroyed during a localized action on June 1, 1864. Most of the 240 men in the attacking companies became casualties. One of the survivors, Charles A. Storke, amassed sufficient wealth as a newspaper publisher in southern California to enable him to raise a substantial marker of Vermont granite at the site in October 1924 (exactly 80 years ago). Storke also served as the first mayor of Santa Barbara. Having achieved his purpose, the aging veteran donated the marker and a tiny piece of land around it to Hanover County.

The unavailability of any publicly preserved battlefield land during the lifetime of the veterans made it especially difficult for those who desired to place monuments. On two occasions this forced the survivors to consciously settle for less than perfect locations. At the Cold Harbor

National Cemetery, which was established immediately after the Civil War, survivors from the 8th New York Heavy Artillery gathered in 1910 to raise a tribute to

tion of their monument. The 8th actually fought across the road from the cemetery, so the marker is not especially meaningful as a site specific landmark. On the other hand, the cemetery where it sits is filled with the regiment's dead.

Less than one year earlier, Pennsylvania had sponsored a monument to honor the men of its state who fought at Cold Harbor. The planners also settled on the national cemetery as the best location for what would become the tallest monument on Richmond's battlefields. The authorities in Pennsylvania considerably provided free train transportation for some veterans who had fought at Cold Harbor. Although every state unit was listed on the inscription, only men who served in units that did not have markers on any other Civil War battlefield were granted the special train accommodations. The unveiling at the cemetery attracted 859 Union veterans, and the expense of transporting them to Cold Harbor (\$11,109.12) was nearly three times the cost of the entire monument.

There are other monuments around the area battlefields that receive even less attention. The veterans of Parker's Battery--a company of artillerists mostly from



J.E.B Stuart monument on what is left of the Yellow Tavern battlefield.

themselves and their comrades. That unit had taken virtually unprecedented casualties on June 3, 1864. 46 years later a party of veterans returned for the dedica-

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Monuments...

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Richmond--placed a marker along the lines at Bermuda Hundred, south of town. The battery defended that region for nearly ten months in 1864 and 1865. The marker is on land now owned by Richmond National Battlefield Park, but it is so obscure that visitors rarely find the site. No one even knows precisely when the veterans erected the stone.

There have been two battlefield monuments at Yellow Tavern. The first appeared within weeks of General J. E. B. Stuart's mortal wounding. William W. Blackford, formerly of the general's staff, raised a very tall wooden cross on the spot. It quickly disappeared. The permanent monument on the spot, now surrounded by houses, dates from 1888.

Many readers will recognize the

so-called "Freeman markers" that crop up all around Richmond's battlefields. Although they cannot qualify as monuments, they repre-



The rarely seen 56th Wisconsin monument north of Cold Harbor.

sent a very early, pre-National Park Service system of interpreta-

tion. Two RBA supporters, Sam Craghead and Bernie Fisher, have been local pioneers in documenting those markers and working toward their preservation. Fisher maintains an interesting website on them that can be seen at <http://freemanmarkers.home.comcast.net>

Finally, in recent years the local national park has permitted the placement of two regular battlefield monuments. One honors the men of Cadmus Wilcox's Alabama brigade. It sits in the woods at Gaines's Mill, on the ground where that brigade stormed over the Union defenses. The other is for the 2nd Connecticut Heavy Artillery, which served as infantry at Cold Harbor. That monument is in the middle of the June 1, 1864, battlefield at Cold Harbor.

There are two schools of thought

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Pennsylvania Monument

THE 1909 MONUMENT

[The following excerpts are from two of the speeches delivered by veterans at the unveiling of the Pennsylvania monument at Cold Harbor exactly 95 years ago. For the most part they reflect the rosy glow of good will that surrounded so many of these ceremonies.]

"I want to say that there is not or never was a nation that produced soldiers better than those who wore BLUE and GRAY in our Civil War--and each man of those armies honestly believed that he belonged to the best regiment in the service. This monument is dedicated to Pennsylvanians who fought on this field....As long as history is written, the deeds of the Pennsylvanians on this field will not be forgotten." **Theodore A. Worrall, Co. B, 97th Pennsylvania Infantry.**

"This monument that you here dedicate to the valor of your troops on the fateful day inscribed thereon will be as safe and as free from vandalism as if erected any where in your splendid Keystone state....We welcome you to this historic soil,

made famous by the heroic deeds of your Pennsylvania troops....If time permitted, I could tell you a story of sacrifice and toil, of courage and endurance on the part of the people in lower Hanover County that would thrill your souls with admiration for as noble a people, who in all the tide of time, have met defeat and disaster. From the desolation and ashes of war they have built comfortable homes; have erected schoolhouses and churches; have defied the very fates and laughed at impossibilities. Again permit me on behalf of the Lee Camp of Confederate Veterans of Richmond, to welcome you in your pious duty of guarding the memories of your fallen comrades. The survivors of those terrible conflicts should unite and see that this battle ground, twice watered with the blood of brave men who exemplified all the heroic qualities of American soldiers is marked, and preserved as well as Antietam and Gettysburg." **John Lamb, a Confederate veteran representing the R. E. Lee Camp United Confederate Veterans.**

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2004 Annual Meeting

Although the RBA's annual meeting in June must qualify as "old news," it deserves a paragraph or two in summary for the members who were unable to attend. This year's gathering occurred at the Willis United Methodist Church on the Frayser's Farm/Glendale battlefield. We were privileged to have William J. Miller, a member of the RBA's original board of directors, as the speaker and tour leader.

After an introductory talk, Miller led an eager crowd of about 60 battlefield trampers on a walking tour of the June 30,

1862, battlefield. In addition to stops on the National Park Service property, the participants also viewed the core of the battlefield on the historic Whitlock Farm. This private property (not generally accessible to the public, but open to us because of Miller's cordial relationship with the landowner) proved to be the highlight of the trip. Bill Miller's vast knowledge of the site and of the battle made this an extraordinary tour. With hindsight, we also know how fortunate we were to have sunny skies. June 12 was, in fact, the best weekend weather day in Richmond all summer.

Still more Monuments

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on the matter of modern battlefield monuments. While monuments undeniably clutter the historic landscape, they also lend legitimacy to the battlefields in the eyes of casual visitors. When places like Malvern Hill, Mechanicsville, and the North Anna River battlefields do not have a single battlefield monument, it sometimes is a challenge to convince the non-specialized public that the importance of a battlefield is not measured by the number of monuments on the field.

YES! I WANT TO HELP PRESERVE OUR NATION'S HERITAGE, PLEASE SIGN ME UP.

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