



# On *Richmond's* FRONT LINE

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## RBA GETS PRESERVATION MONEY

For the first time in its history the Richmond Battlefields Assn. has received government money to assist in preserving the Richmond area battlefields. In 2008 the Virginia General Assembly set aside slightly more than \$5 million in its "Civil War Historic Site Preservation Fund." Applicants were required to meet very strict criteria that emphasized historical significance and landscape integrity. The rules permitted submission of battlefield preservation projects that had been completed recently, were in process, or were pending. That liberal format allowed the RBA to apply for money to help pay for the recently completed 11 acre purchase at Cold Harbor.

In mid-November the Virginia Department of Historic Resources announced that 15

preservation endeavors across the state had qualified for portions of the preservation money, including the Cold Harbor project.

Under the framework of the grants, preservation groups are required to match the state's money at a 2 to 1 ratio. For every dollar supplied by Virginia, the RBA must provide two. This is the sort of system that is popular today, as it makes non-profits work hard to earn their reward. It also increases the impact of private donations. Every one of you who answered the call to help with the purchase of the battlefield land at Cold Harbor, or who intends to contribute over the winter, can take pride and pleasure in knowing that your money is in effect increased by 50%.

Not surprisingly, RBA president Julie Krick expressed delight

at the announcement. "We are very grateful to Virginia's public leaders for recognizing the critical role Civil War battlefields play in the state's identity. Protecting these fragile and one-of-a-kind sites will make a lot of people happy now and for many years to come, both in Virginia and around the country. The state's help is a vital ingredient in reaching our local preservation goals."

Virginia governor Tim Kaine endorsed the fund's objectives: "I am pleased that we are able to join with these private organizations to save important open spaces and cultural landscapes while we still have the opportunity." The governor has said that a goal of his administration is "to protect 400,000 acres of open spaces by 2010."

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## Still More Good News

Battlefield preservation projects that were "in the works" also qualified for the Virginia state preservation money in certain circumstances. For more than a year now the RBA has been working toward the purchase of approximately 30 acres of core battlefield land at the Fussell's Mill/Second Deep Bottom battlefield, from August 1864. It is a complicated project that has not ended. Nothing is official and the land is not yet protected, but the RBA board is cautiously optimistic that the ground will be purchased and preserved sometime soon. The "Civil War Historic Site Preservation Fund" also granted money toward that project, but of course it all is contingent on closing the deal. If that happens, the RBA would benefit from a second, even larger influx of state money to help offset the cost of that project, once again at the 2 to 1 matching formula. That project would require vigorous fund-raising for the RBA to meet its share of the total price. Stay tuned for further details.



## Profile of a Cold Harbor Casualty

South Carolinian Laurence Masillon Keitt represented his state by literally fighting Yankees in the U. S. Congress and then as a regimental commander in Civil War combat. The Richmond Battlefields Association recently acquired the site of his final battle near Old Cold Harbor.

At first glance, the colonel's surname looks as though it might be pronounced with a long "i," sounding like Ben Franklin's wind-blown device in an electrical storm. Thirty-five years ago I called the South Carolina state librarian, Estelline Paxton Walker, to ask about the name. She assured me, in a soft drawl, that the name is rendered as "KIT." Wesley Nichols of Keitt's Brigade's 15th South Carolina, always a phonetic speller, confirmed that when he called the colonel "Kitt" in his *Autobiography and Civil War Recollections*. To add a bit to the confusion, the first given name appears at least half the time spelled Lawrence.

As a member of Congress, Keitt played a major role in a melee on the floor of the House in February 1858, attacking a Pennsylvania Representative with his fists. An eyewitness said the Yankee had "been captured and was being pun-

ished."

L. M. Keitt went to war in command of the 20th South Carolina. One of his soldiers described his colonel's "superb figure, handsome features, with high brow and long flowing black beard, and his grace-



*Colonel Keitt's "graceful bearing" is evident in this 19th century woodcut.*

ful bearing." The same man quoted Keitt saying, perhaps presciently: "Liberty! What is it in its last analysis, but the blood of martyrs!"

On June 1, 1864, newly arrived in Virginia after long duty in South Carolina, Col. Keitt led his regiment into battle at Cold Harbor.

The green 20th, a Confederate newspaper reported a few days later, "could not stand the fiery test" of its first real combat. As Keitt bravely, desperately, attempted to rally his frightened men, mounted on a horse borrowed from

General Joe Kershaw, he went down "shot through the body, the ball lodging in the liver." He died the next day.

With characteristic Victorian focus, a young staff officer near the hard-hit colonel recorded his last words. In the grip of final mortal anguish, the dying man's mind turned to his wife Susanna and their two children. He died murmuring "Wife, wife." Keitt was 39 years old.

General Kershaw saw to returning his dead subordinate's body to his home and family. Keitt lies in a family cemetery in St. Matthews, S.C. His line does not survive: one daughter died young and the other never married. But the RBA relishes the successful protection of the site of Col. Keitt's mortal wounding as a lasting memorial to his demise.

**Robert K. Krick**

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## The Three Graves of General A.P. Hill

Although this Confederate lieutenant general never lived in Richmond and was not killed on one of the local battlefields, he is very closely identified with the area's Civil War history for several reasons. His newly formed "Light Division" played a critical role in the Seven Days battles in 1862. In fact, Hill precipitated the movement and launched the first attack east of Mechanicsville. His division also initiated the fighting at Gaines's Mill the next day. The same men fought hand-to-hand at Frazer's Farm/Glendale on June

30, under Hill's leadership, on land that the RBA has helped to preserve. Two years later Hill commanded the entire Third Corps at Cold Harbor. He was killed during the decisive Union surge west of Petersburg on April 2, 1865, while racing across the nose of the Union breakthrough in an effort to reach the balance of his corps before the army's wings became irretrievably separated.

When a pair of Sixth Corps soldiers killed Hill, they likely did not realize precisely what they had done. The courier riding with Hill

scurried off, leaving the general dead on the ground. The men who shot him moved on, too. A search party returned to the scene and rescued the body later on April 2. The portion of the Confederate army still at Petersburg fought all that day to buy time before a nighttime retreat. For a final few hours, communication and transportation between Richmond and Petersburg remained open.

The question of what to do with Hill's body vexed his family and

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staff officers. The fluid situation around Petersburg did not look promising. Deteriorating Confederate fortunes forced a hasty improvisation. The slain corps commander would not receive a state funeral like Stonewall Jackson, nor even a subdued yet reverent tribute like J. E. B. Stuart.

Several of General Hill's relatives were on hand and took charge in the emergency. Loading the body into a wagon or ambulance, they rode some 25 miles north to Richmond.

The capital city had only a few more hours of independence remaining when the gloomy Hill party rolled into the city in the overnight darkness of April 2-3. Jefferson Davis's presidential entourage had climbed aboard a train that probably pulled out of Richmond at about the same time the Hills arrived.

The Hill cousins faced a problem: where in the disorganized and dark city could they find a coffin, particularly one suitable for one of the country's most famous generals? The solution lay at Belvin's Block, just southeast of Capitol Square. The "block" was a large office building near the corner of 14th Street. In addition to many private and government offices, Belvin's had become one of the key spots in wartime Richmond for burial work. An embalmer operated from there, and Mr. Belvin produced coffins. Although the details are fuzzy, the Hills either gained admission to the building with assistance or broke into it. They procured a coffin, put A. P. Hill into it, and turned south to escape the doomed city.

At some point during the proceedings they decided the best place to burial General Hill was at

the cemetery of some very distant cousins on the south side of the James River, in Chesterfield County. Crossing Mayo's Bridge in the darkness, just hours before the last Confederates to leave Richmond burned the bridge, the Hill group turned west toward the



*Today General Hill's monument is almost inaccessible due to very heavy automobile traffic. Drivers would scarcely recognize the original setting.*

Winston Farm. They arrived there on April 3 and overnight on April 3-4 they buried General A. P. Hill in the small private cemetery. There is no evidence that they marked his grave.

The Winston Family Cemetery survives today, just south of the James River. Its location is off Wainfleet Drive, south of Cherokee Road and about one mile north of Huguenot Road. It lies just within the limits of the city of Richmond and is one of the most interesting little-known Civil War sites in the area.

Friends and family understandably felt in the postwar years that General Hill deserved a more public and accessible burial, as befitted a man of his prominence and popularity. Although his widow kept a very low profile, the general's longtime chief of staff William H. Palmer did not. A native of Richmond and one of the army's most important staff officers, Palmer worked hard to burnish Hill's name and achievements. The ex-staffer rose to business prominence soon after the war. He spearheaded an effort in 1867 to remove Hill's body to the most

famous cemetery in the south. On July 1, just 26 months after the general's death, Palmer arranged to convey Hill's remains to a newly purchased lot in Hollywood Cemetery. The new spot was in Section N, plot 38.

Thousands made the pilgrimage to Hollywood Cemetery every year. Stuart's grave, those of a dozen or so other Confederate generals, and of course the extensive Soldiers' Section garnered the most attention. But Hill's grave could be found at its hilltop location, just up the slope from the notable Major Chatham "Rob" Wheat of the Louisiana Tigers,

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who had died at Gaines's Mill. The slender available evidence suggests that Hill did not have a headstone, and that pedestrians oblivious to the significance of the site had worn a path across the grave. But an 1884 visitor reported that "cut in the granite curbstone that borders the carriage road ten feet from the grave, we find, 'Lt. Gen'l A. P. Hill.'" That curb is gone today, removed at some unknown time, possibly during a road-widening.

In due time Palmer and his cohorts decided to move Hill's remains yet again, in an effort to give him still more prominence in postwar Richmond. This was done on June 24, 1891, and on this occa-

sion Hill was taken to his final destination in Richmond, at the corner of Laburnum Avenue and the Boulevard. His friends erected a



large and attractive monument to him there, under which he is buried. The monument served as a visual gateway to a new development on the northern side of Richmond. Lewis Ginter, a wealthy Richmonder and former staff officer in Hill's Third Corps, assisted in the project.

Today visitors to Richmond rarely see the Hill monument/grave because it is away from the normal tourist routes. The Hill monument is as large and as impressive as the better known statues on Monument Avenue.

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