

On Richmond's FRONT LINE

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More Land Preserved

Within the past few weeks the RBA has taken title to a small piece of property south of Richmond, along the Bermuda Hundred front. The 1.69 acre tract is notable as the site of historic Ware Bottom Church, which was destroyed during the fighting in the vicinity in 1864. Battlefield trampers familiar with the "Parker's Battery" unit of the local national park will recognize the vicinity; the church stood just east of Parker's Battery, and is separated from that park unit only by a modern railroad right of way.

The acreage was donated to the RBA by a local company. It represents the first land preserved in Chesterfield County by the RBA. It is a relatively small stretch of land, but it has considerable significance, as documented elsewhere in this newsletter.

Although the land was "free," the RBA incurred some of the usual expenses associated with closing a transaction. Sometime soon there will be a plan in place to develop the property for visitors, with signs, and the RBA will appeal for financial help then.

Breaking News

Earlier this year the RBA closed on 30 acres of battlefield land at the Fussell's Mill/Second Deep Bottom battlefield. This is a very significant purchase, and represents the largest piece of preserved ground on that battlefield. There has been no major announcement heretofore, but full details will be forthcoming, together with the inevitable request for help in paying for this important piece of blood-soaked battlefield land.

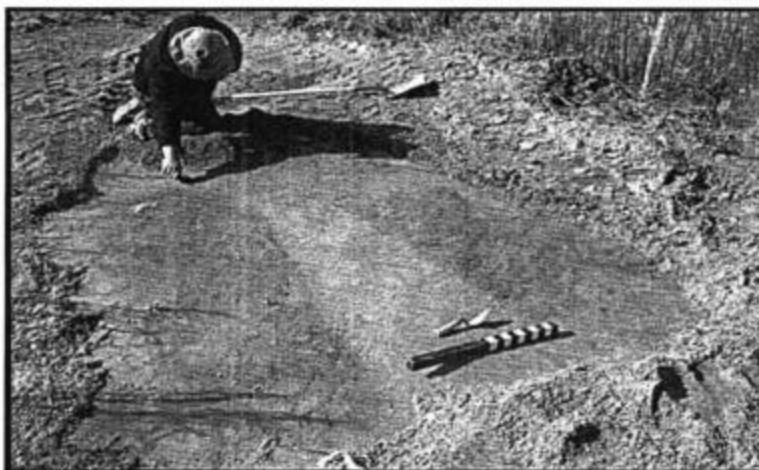
Annual Meeting details inside, see page 3.

Ware Bottom Church

Early History of the Church

Ware Bottom Church unquestionably was one of the earliest churches built in Virginia. Although concrete evidence is sparse, it appears that the church dates from the early 1700's. The

records refer to the building as "Jefferson's Church," which has fueled speculation that local artisan Thomas Jefferson (grandfather of the U. S. president) constructed it. That remains unproved. Other circumstantial



Archeologists recently discovered the site of Ware Bottom Church's old cemetery. Although they did not excavate any graves, the stains of the original gravesbafts were clearly visible, as seen here.

county's historian has guessed that the building either took its name from its proximity to nearby Ware Run, or from some connection to a parson named Jacob Ware, who enjoyed prominence "until his untimely death from bad liquor in 1709." Some early

evidence suggests that a church building might have stood on the site as early as the 1630's, probably under some other name.

The cemetery attached to the church offers an amazing link between the 21st century and the 18th century. A recent survey by professional archeologists identified 94 grave sites around the property, all in close proximity to the location of the church. It is possible, though not likely, that some of the graves are for Union soldiers who died in action around the church in 1864. None of the

Continued on page 2

Meeting/Tour at Fussell's Mill

The RBA's annual meeting is scheduled, as always, for the second Saturday in June. This year that falls on the 13th. We will assemble on RBA property along the scenic banks of Fussell's millpond, on the Second Deep Bottom/Fussell's Mill battlefield. The ground features an interesting variety of Civil War era resources: an historic house, the ruins of the antebellum mill, and a string of Confederate entrenchments that figured in the fighting there on both August 14 and August 16, 1864.

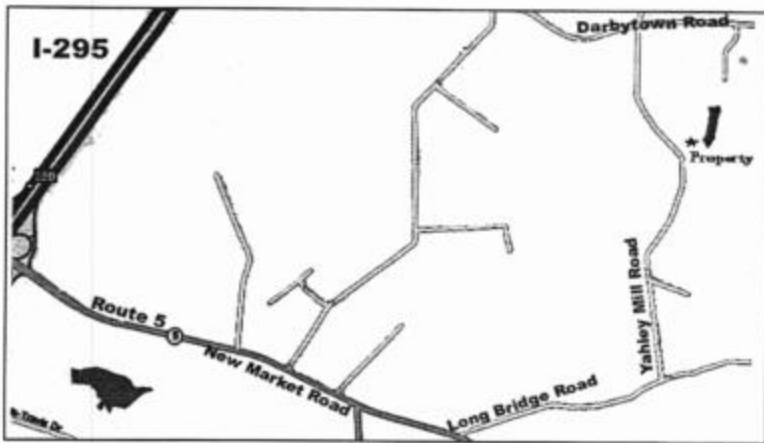
This year's event will be much less elaborate than last year's, which was at White House on the Pamunkey River. In one way it will be extra special, because the

RBA has not had an annual meeting on its own property since Fort Harrison several years ago. To the best of our knowledge this is the first ever large scale public access to this portion of the battlefield.

The meeting starts at 10:30 a.m. and will run until 12:30 p.m. There will be a talk on Alabamians at Fussell's Mill by board member and Army of Northern Virginia authority Robert K. Krick. Mike Andrus, an historian at the local Richmond National Battlefield Park, will speak on the battle and will lead a walking tour of the property. Limited access to the historic house also will be available. The RBA will hold its annu-

al business meeting after the tour. Additionally, there will be items up for raffle, including a postwar document signed by Confederate general (and later state governor) James L. Kemper, of Gettysburg fame. Any members who have items to add to the raffle should contact the RBA in advance; we will be glad to raise the extra cash!

The event is free and open both to members and to the general public. Bring friends, family, or anyone who might be interested in seeing this portion of the battlefield. The scenic pond is a perfect setting for a post-tour picnic lunch, too. Due to parking concerns, please carpool if possible. A "port-a-john" will be on site.



Directions

- 1: From I-295 go EAST on ROUTE 5 for 1 3/4 miles.
- 2: Turn LEFT onto LONG BRIDGE ROAD, go 4/5 mile.
- 3: Turn LEFT onto YAHLEY MILL ROAD, go 1 mile.
- 4: Turn RIGHT onto a private driveway marked by signs
- 5: Follow the gravel road, driving slowly, until you see the parking area.

An Extra Reason to Attend this Year!

The good folks at the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond have agreed to provide a special bonus for those in attendance at the annual meeting. They will have on temporary display at the site, for an hour or two only, the personal effects of Colonel Laurence M. Keitt of the 20th South Carolina Infantry. Although Keitt had nothing to do with Fussell's Mill or Second Deep Bottom, readers will recall that he was mortally wounded at Cold Harbor while leading an ill-arranged and extremely unsuccessful attack on June 1, 1864. His injury occurred either on, or very close to, the 11 acres at Cold Harbor preserved by the RBA last year. Don't miss a chance to see items that have a connection to land we all helped to save!

The masthead on page 1 shows the Civil War-era house now owned by the RBA on the Fussell's Mill battlefield.

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—Continued from page 1—

graves are marked today in the traditional sense, but portions of two broken tombstones have survived. Both are for ship captains based in Liverpool, England, who died while in Virginia.

Captain Ashburn of the ship *Fly* has a stone that once read: "William Ashburn of Liverpool who traded to this Province for many years Died the 25th Day of October 1773 Aged 43 Years and was buried beneath This Stone." He had commanded a succession of merchant ships that traveled between Liverpool and the James River. Captain John Breakhill sailed his ship the *John* between Liverpool and Virginia repeatedly between 1766 and his death on June 5, 1772, age 56.

A third potential connection is to a man named Thomas Banks "alias Williams," and is documented in a *Virginia Gazette* obituary of January 1, 1767. The newspaper called Banks "the singing boy, the pirate, the fiddler, the schoolmaster, the clerk of Jefferson's church, in Chesterfield, and finally an honest man." It is unclear if Banks is buried at Ware Bottom Church.

One of the two surviving stones has been stolen within the past few years.

The church during the Civil War

Thousands of soldiers from

both armies saw Ware Bottom Church in 1864. They fought around it repeatedly in May and June; thereafter it stood between the contending lines at Bermuda Hundred until April 1865.

The action often called the Battle of Ware Bottom Church occurred on May 20, 1864. It pitted the 10th Corps of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler's Army of the James against elements of the Confederate army then commanded by Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard. Butler's force had retreated into the Bermuda Hundred peninsula after the disastrous battle at Drewry's Bluff on May 16. The Confederates enjoyed all the initiative at that time. Beauregard and his engineers recognized that the local geography could strengthen the qualities of their own defensive line. In an effort to shorten that line--thereby using fewer troops to defend the peninsula--they launched attacks on the 20th. Their limited objectives included most of Butler's picket line, stretching from the James River past Ware Bottom Church and on toward the Appomattox River.

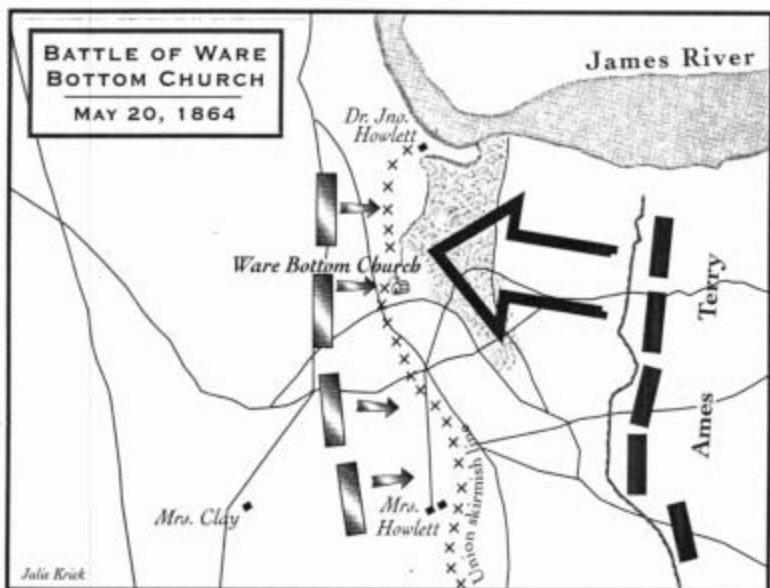
The Battle of Ware Bottom Church produced serious combat in an area described by one Confederate as "a wild, thickly wooded country with few clearings, and in many places broken up into short but steep hills." On May 20, eight Confederate

brigades attacked Butler's picket lines. The heaviest fighting occurred on the northern end of the peninsula, where South Carolina brigades led by generals Johnson Hagood and William S. Walker struck the Union divisions of Alfred H. Terry and Adelbert Ames. The regiments of Walker's brigade are best known today because of their connection to the Battle of the Crater, where many of them were blown up two months later. One prominent episode during the May 20 fight occurred near the church when General Walker, disoriented by the combat, rode into the Union lines, was shot from his horse, and captured. Surgeons amputated the general's leg later that evening, and Army of the James veterans wrangled for the rest of their lives about which regiment shot Walker, and which one captured him. The next day Beauregard summarized the action: "We remain in possession of [the] enemy's riflepits and ground gained by yesterday's fight, which was quite severe...especially near Ware Bottom Church....We have...succeeded...in obtaining for ourselves the desired line."

The modest gains on May 20 produced the shorter lines he needed and allowed him to send Robert Hoke's entire division to reinforce Lee's army at Cold Harbor ten days later. Anyone doubting the ferocity of this virtually unknown battle should look at the combined casualties during the day's combat: approximately 1500 men, nearly all of whom were killed or wounded rather than captured.

In mid June 1864, Grant's movement to Petersburg again imperiled Beauregard. The diminutive Confederate found himself forced to choose between defending Petersburg and holding the Bermuda Hundred lines. He abandoned the latter in favor of the former. Only Butler's lassitude prevented the Unionists from permanently severing the connection between Richmond and Petersburg. The Ware Bottom

Continued on page 4



Ware Bottom....

Continued from page 2

Church area once again lay behind Union lines for a short time. Lee's army, belatedly racing toward Petersburg, paused long enough to attack Butler yet again in the Ware Bottom Church area. Men of George Pickett's Confederate division retook the abandoned ground on June 16 and reestablished the Confederate line across the peninsula. During that brief episode the 11th Maine Infantry literally fought in the yard of the church.

Local preservationists in Chesterfield County have done fine work in saving other little pieces of Bermuda Hundred battlefields, including the excellent

Howlett House Battery (Battery Dantzier). The Ware Bottom Church property now protected by the RBA is virtually adjacent to the National Park Service's Parker's Battery site, and is just north of a small parcel owned by Chesterfield County known as "Howlett Line Park."

The historic church stood until June 18, 1864, when it became an unbearable source of annoyance for the artillerists of Parker's Virginia Battery, who manned their cannon only a few hundred yards west of the church. Federal sharpshooters harassed the church to harass the gunners. Three volunteers from the battery crawled out through their own picket lines and daringly ignited a

fire inside the church. The flames blossomed and the historic church burned to the ground. For the next ten months the site stood between the lines, part of the extensive "no man's land" that divided the contending forces.

There are no known photographs or sketches of the building, yet its appearance and dimensions are of record. A Virginia infantryman, writing in his diary only a few hours before the conflagration destroyed the building, called Ware Bottom a "small frame church." Archeology has revealed that the building was long and narrow, measuring approximately 24 feet by 66 feet, and resting on brick foundations. The site now is preserved forever.

Yes!

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

(Please print)

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Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Daytime Phone _____ E-mail Address _____

Type of Membership:

\$1000 Benefactor \$500 Patron \$250 Sustaining Member \$100 Active Member \$35 Annual Member

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