



Summer 2010

RBA Receives Special Donation

In July the Richmond Battlefields Association learned of a surprising and significant donation. For many years the excellent folks at the Civil War Roundtable of Eastern Pennsylvania have been aggressive supporters of battlefield preservation, both nationally and here at Richmond. The following excerpts from their recent press release tell the tale:

"Long time Civil War Round Table of Eastern Pennsylvania member Karl Lehr passed away at the age of 93 on February 19, 2009. Karl led a full and distinguished life. Born in Allentown, he was a 1936 graduate of Muhlenberg College. During World War II Karl held the rank of Technical Sergeant and was a part of history during three major invasions. As a member of the First Signal Detachment on the USS Ancon, flagship for the landing at Omaha Beach, he was at Normandy on June 6, 1944. He had also taken part in the earlier landings at Sicily and Salerno, Italy in 1943. Karl joined the Civil War Round Table of Eastern Pennsylvania about 30 years ago. He immediately became an active member serving on numerous committees. He was also a field trip co-chair and submitted items to our newsletter. Karl was generous in many ways including his time and knowledge. He spoke to our group on the subject of "From Pea Ridge to Atlanta" and became part of a Resource Committee of members who volunteered to speak to outside groups or share knowledge with those who need-

ed assistance in a quest for information. He served on our Board of Directors and as such helped form our Preservation and Restoration Committee in 1983. Round Table records show Karl's commitment to historic preservation through signed petitions to save the Grove Farm at Antietam and monetary donations to various organizations as threats to our historic sites became known.



Karl may have left us, but his legacy of honor, commitment and generosity remains. His financial legacy to the Civil War Round Table of Eastern Pennsylvania is the amazing amount of \$123,955.31! The Board of Directors and the Preservation and Restoration Committee, led by Jack Minnich, determined to honor Karl in the best possible way and that is to further the cause of historic preservation. Consequently, we have added to Karl's legacy for a total of \$128,000. That money

will be distributed by the Round Table in Karl's name to the following organizations:

- Central Virginia Battlefield Trust \$53,000 to help save 93 acres on the Wilderness Battlefield.
- Richmond Battlefields Association \$53,000.
- Civil War Preservation Trust \$22,000 to help save 10 acres at Manassas.

These three organizations have a proven track record in successful historic preservation as well as the efficient use of donations. In many cases they have entered into cooperative agreements. They are not competitors, but kindred souls serving a common cause. One result of their success is the ability to obtain matching grants. We can think of no better way to remember and honor Karl Lehr than to preserve and protect the historic legacy of our nation for future generations.

The Civil War Round Table of Eastern Pennsylvania, Inc. is a non-profit organization formed in 1978 dedicated to serving the broad community's education needs concerning the American Civil War and to historic site preservation. Since its inception and prior to Mr. Lehr's gift, over \$120,000 (not including matching funds) has been raised to support numerous preservation and restoration projects." Stay tuned. Later in the fall we will announce the details on how this unprecedented generosity from a roundtable (and one its members) will be employed on Richmond's battlefields.



Virginia's Early Battlefield Markers

"Virginia roads improved for automobile touring....Richmond a centre of good roads to many places of great historic interest....with the improvement of Virginia roads, Richmond is destined to become an important tourist gateway between the North and the South."

New York Times, 10/15/1915

Virginia's Civil War battlefields were destined to become a major attraction for the growing automobile touring movement thanks to the efforts of a group of civic-minded citizens following World War One. It was about this time that two Richmond Rotary Club members, Douglas Southall Freeman and J. Ambler Johnston, began regular Sunday outings to "tramp around the forlorn and desolate fields" of Richmond's Civil War battlegrounds. Johnston agreed to show Freeman what he knew about the 1864 battlegrounds and Freeman in turn would share his knowledge of the 1862 action. Subsequently, Freeman and Johnston persuaded their fellow Rotarians to explore the area battlegrounds. Enlisting the aid of dozens of Confederate veterans from the Soldiers' Home, a caravan of twenty-one automobiles set out for Hanover and Henrico Counties on Labor Day 1921. Some of the roads were impassable and as Johnston described it on a previous trip "from Mechanicsville to Ellerson's Mill there was a mudhole about 250 feet long in the road so deep that a detour into a field had to be made around it, and someone had put up a pole in the mudhole with a sign reading 'No fishin aloud.'" The group wisely brought along a

tow truck.

In March 1924, after an appeal by Freeman, the Richmond Rotary Club enthusiastically adopted a plan to identify and mark these historic sites and appointed a committee to oversee the project. They straightaway collected \$2,000 from the members. In April the effort was enlarged by incorporation of the Battlefield Markers Association, whose purpose was to "identify points of interest on various battlefields of Virginia and to place thereon suitable markers." The board of trustees consisted of representatives from



A very early view of the historic Watt House at Gaines's Mill, looking west. A newly placed Freeman marker is visible on the right.

the City of Richmond, Hanover and Henrico Counties, memorial societies, Confederate veterans groups, merchants associations, professional groups, and other civic organizations. The officers were all Rotarians, including the president, E. Tucker Harrison. The Rotary Club raised \$5,000 for the endeavor and the Richmond City Council provided an additional \$5,000.

Over the next three years, the association erected 59 roadside markers in the Richmond area. The markers, designed to be read from an automobile, consist of cast iron inscription tablets (2'3" x 3'5") with 2" headings and 1" text. The iron plate is set at an angle on a large concrete capstone

(4' x 3') which rests on a granite base approximately 4 feet high. Employees of the Richmond Stove Works donated their time to manufacture the cast iron plates. The Economy Concrete Company provided the capstones, and Boscobel Quarries donated the rough granite. The association spent countless hours researching locations, negotiating with landowners, verifying names and dates, and supervising erection of the markers. According to Johnston, "Not a single person has failed to give permission for the erection of a marker on their land, and not a person has charged the

Association a dollar for any services rendered." The association did, however, pay truckers to haul the stone and stonemasons to construct the bases. Freeman wrote most of the marker text as later recounted by Johnston: "Doug furnished the brains, the rest of us did the foot work." Markers were placed for the Seven Pines

Battlefield, Seven Days Battles, Stuart's Ride Around McClellan, Cold Harbor Campaign, Drewry's Bluff, Chaffin's Bluff, and the Defensive Fortifications encircling Richmond. These "Freeman Markers," as they are commonly called, were the first highway markers in Virginia.

An invitation to dedicate the battlefield markers was extended to President Coolidge by Freeman. "We believe if you would come to Richmond and deliver this address it would have a profound effect on feeling, north and south and would strengthen all the ties that have been forged in half a century." It can be



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assumed that the President politely declined. Nonetheless, on November 6, 1925, a ceremony was held at the Walnut Grove Baptist Church in Hanover County for the "Dedication of Markers Commemorating the Seven Days' Campaign of 1862." The invocation was given by 87-year old Rev. Giles B. Cooke, a former major on General Lee's staff. Both E. Tucker Harrison and Douglas S. Freeman spoke. Dr. John F. Bright, Mayor of Richmond, presented the markers to Virginia Governor E. Lee Trinkle, who in turn gave custody of them to Hanover and Henrico Counties. Robert E. Lee's grandson, Dr. George Bolling Lee,

Battlefield Markers on the Web

It is now possible to visit the historical markers described in the accompanying article from the comfort of home. The author maintains a website on the Richmond area Battlefield Markers Association markers at <http://freemanmarkers.home.com-cast.net/~freemanmarkers/index.html> (or just google "Freeman Markers"). The Western Division markers can be found on The Historical Marker Database (HMdb) website at www.hmdb.org. The HMdb is a searchable, illustrated online catalog containing thousands of photographs, transcriptions, marker locations, maps, commentaries, and links to more information. It can be filtered by state, county, zip code, historical period, or some sixty other categories, as well as by keywords. This site also features virtual battlefield tours by marker. With over 27,000 entries (7,500 related to the Civil War), you're sure to find something of interest.

unveiled the marker commemorating the meeting of Lee and Jackson at Walnut Grove Church on June 27, 1862.

The success of the Richmond association inspired others in the state to organize. In September of 1925, the Battlefield Markers Association (Western Division) was formed by C.B. Linney of Charlottesville and R.M. Colvin of Harrisonburg. Its purpose was "to raise funds for the purchase of bronze tablets with appropriate historic inscriptions, to be placed on the bases erected by the Daughters of the Confederacy, D.A.R., and Memorial Association on the principal battlefields of Virginia." With Hollis Rinehart as president, they erected 25 markers from Bull Run to Appomattox and throughout the Shenandoah Valley. These markers, though similar in design to those in Richmond, are slightly larger and consist of heavy bronze tablets atop white granite block bases. The tops of these monuments also incline toward the reader. On the 64th anniversary of the Battle of Chancellorsville (05/03/1927), Douglas S. Freeman was the keynote speaker at the dedication of five such markers: Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Salem Church, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania. The 2,000 spectators "enjoyed ham, chicken, and pies supplied by the ladies of Spotsylvania County" while being regaled by the musical offerings of the Stonewall Brigade Band and a children's choral group.

Back in Richmond, the mission "to acquire historic sites for preservation and restoration" began in earnest with the 1927 purchase of Fort Harrison at public auction for \$18,000. The effort to preserve Civil War sites advanced with the creation of the Richmond Battlefield Parks Corporation, a "non-profit organization to preserve and make accessible the battlefields around Richmond." Under the leadership of T.M. Carrington, they solicited funds to purchase land and resurrected an earlier idea to connect these sites with a battlefield road.

Hanover, Henrico and Chesterfield Counties donated their 1929 annual proceeds from a gasoline tax toward construction of a battlefield route.

In 1932, the Richmond Battlefield Parks Corporation donated their acquired 720 acres of land to the Commonwealth of Virginia to establish the first state park - Richmond Battlefield State Park. The following year, the Highway Department designated the battlefield tour route, State Route 156 (still in use today). On July 14, 1944, the accomplishments of these pioneering battlefield preservationists culminated in the establishment of the Richmond National Battlefield Park.

What of those early battlefield markers? One of the Seven Pines markers was destroyed during construction of the Richmond Army Air Base during WWII. It was later replaced, only to fall victim to vandalism and theft

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On *Richmond's*
FRONT LINE

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Virginia's Battlefield Markers (Contd.)

decades later. A 1956 report by the Richmond Civil War Round Table states that two damaged markers were replaced by City of Richmond and publicly unveiled. Elsewhere, the Chancellorsville plate was stolen in the 1970s, and as recently as 2006 the Port Republic marker was destroyed by a tractor trailer. Several of the markers have been moved from their original locations due to road projects and development.

Winston Churchill, a keen student of American history, spent most of October 1929 touring Virginia's Civil War battlefields. He later wrote of the Richmond area battlefields, "It was with deep

interest that I followed these memorable operations. No one can understand what happened merely through reading books and studying maps. You must see the ground; you must cover the distances in person; you must measure the rivers, and see what the swamps were really like."

When the Battlefield Markers Association dedicated the roadside marker at Walnut Grove Church in 1929, they could little have imagined the suburban scene today. The once quiet crossroads, where Generals Hill, Jackson, and Lee met to plan the attack at Gaines' Mill, now sees more than 11,000 cars each day.

The work of those early 20th century preservationists continues through the efforts of the Richmond Battlefields Association. Thanks to the generosity and dedication of the members, future generations will also one day "see the ground" and "cover the distance in person" when studying our great national struggle.

[Thanks to Bernard J. Fisher, of the RBA board, for researching and writing this piece. He is a past president of the Richmond Civil War Roundtable, and is a Contributing Editor to The Historical Marker Database].

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

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