American Battlefield Trust, Shenandoah University Honored for Work at Virginia's Cool Spring Battlefield

Wingate Mackay-Smith Clarke County Land Conservation Award recognizes the partnership that transformed a former golf course into a battlefield park and an outdoor classroom.

Mary Koik, ABT April 22, 2021

(Washington, D.C.) -The American Battlefield Trust and Shenandoah University were recently honored with the 2020 Wingate Mackay-Smith Clarke County Land Conservation Award for a partnership that transformed a former golf course into a battlefield park and outdoor university classroom.

The award from the county Conservation Easement Authority recognizes the preservation and stewardship of the Cool Spring Battlefield. The site along the Shenandoah River is now protected from development and is an enriching learning space for Shenandoah University while the park has become unparalleled community resource, especially in this past year as residents sought outdoor space for socially distanced recreation.

Sunset over the Shenandoah River at Cool Springs Battlefield, Clarke County, Va. Matt Brant

"Cool Spring is a remarkable landscape, simultaneously significant in both historic and ecological contexts," said Trust President David Duncan. "We often speak of a protected battlefield's landscape to function as an outdoor classroom, but nowhere has this been more fully realized than on the banks of the Shenandoah River in Clarke County."

The site was protected through a public-private partnership between the Trust and Shenandoah University that began 2011. Once home to the Virginia National Golf Club, the Trust secured the 195-acre property using member donations and matching grants from the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program and the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund to finance the $2 million purchase price.

During a 2013 celebration, ownership of the site was turned over to Shenandoah University, which integrated the land's crucial role in the July 18, 1864, Battle of Cool Spring and its 10,000 linear feet of frontage on the Shenandoah River into a hands-on learning venue for students. Thanks to a perpetual conservation easement held by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the site will remain forever pristine and free of inappropriate development.

Today, the Shenandoah River Campus at Cool Spring Battlefield supports several university departments and activities. Classes in the environmental studies, outdoor leadershi p, and history programs investigate the property's history and ecology and develop leadership skills, while students, faculty, staff and administrators all visit the River Campus for meetings, recreation, team building, and inspiration. Students pursue both interpretation of the battlefield and

research into native habitats and water quality.

With hiking and biking trails, as well as river access, recreational opportunities are legion — both for students and the general public, which is welcomed to the site daily. Cool Spring park is now a local destination for walking, biking, bird watching and other wildlife observation. Commonly seen creatures include bald eagles, cormorants, red-winged blackbirds, a nesting colony of great blue heron, bats, a dozen species of turtles, red foxes, muskrats, deer and beavers. Notable flora include large swaths of Virginia bluebells, century-old giant sycamores, silver maples, box elders and the rare bur oak.

The Trust's Chief Land Preservation Officer Tom Gilmore (left) accepts the award on the organization's behalf. American Battlefield Trust

"Shenandoah University is conscious that we are the stewards of a remarkable resource at Cool Spring and take that responsibility quite seriously," said Jonathan Noyalas, director of Shenandoah University's McCormick Civil War Institute. "We have the opportunity to build a true heritage tourism destination and train the next generation of historians with real-world experience using Cool Spring's rich historical landscape."

"The permanent stewardship of this property by Shenandoah University was an ideal outcome for the property," said Trust Chief Land Preservation Officer Tom Gilmore, who accepted the award on the organization's behalf. "We frequently cite this partnership as a model we seek to replicate across the country."

Clarke County's Conservation Easement Authority was established in 2002 to protect and preserve local agricultural, natural, recreational, and historic land. In 2015, the CEA created the Wingate Mackay-Smith Clarke County Land Conservation Award as a way of honoring and drawing attention to organizations and individuals for their work in protecting open spaces in the county. Today, with the help of the CEA, American Battlefield Trust, Virginia Outdoors Foundation, and other organizations, 25 percent of Clarke County has been protected by preservation or conservation easement.

The American Battlefield Trust is dedicated to preserving America's hallowed battlegrounds and educating the public about what happened there and why it matters today. The nonprofit, nonpartisan organization has protected more than 53,000 acres associated with the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War.

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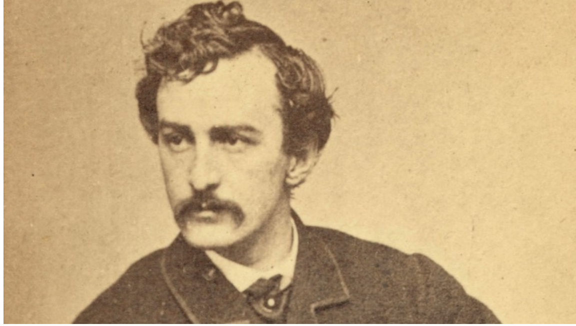
A Look at John Wilkes Booth's Escape Route After Assassinating Lincoln



Library of Congress

Follow in the tracks of John Wilkes Booth's desperate flee for freedom for a captivating adventure

Melissa A. Winn, HistoryNet, May 2021

"Sic semper tyrannis." The words roared over the heads of the hushed crowd at Ford's Theatre. It was April 14, 1865, and Abraham Lincoln had just been shot. Envisioning himself a hero and a martyr for the Southern cause, actor John Wilkes Booth bellowed those words—Latin for "Thus always to tyrants"—after leaping onto the stage from the theater's presidential box, where he had fatally wounded the beloved president with a .44-caliber Derringer pistol. Booth escaped through a stage door, mounted a horse waiting for him in the back alley, and bolted away.

Accompanied by David Herold, a fellow conspirator, Booth would be aided by a host of knowing or unwitting accomplices as he fled Washington, D.C. The two men spent the next 12 days trekking through southern Maryland, across the Potomac River, and finally into the countryside of northern Virginia, all the while being hunted by Federal troops.

On April 26, surrounded by Union soldiers in a barn near Bowling Green, Va., Herold surrendered. Booth, however, refused, saying, "I prefer to come out and fight." The Federals set the barn ablaze to force the issue and Sergeant Boston Corbett shot Booth in the neck. Booth would die three hours later. The manhunt was over.

Today, much of the countryside on Booth's escape route is unchanged, and several of his more famous stopovers, including the Surratt Tavern and the farm of Dr. Samuel Mudd, are preserved as historic sites and museums. The 90-mile route can be explored in a single day. Civil War Trails Inc. offers a tour map of the route and its signs inform the narrative along the way. In tracing the path from Booth's fateful first act at Ford's Theatre to his epilogue at that tobacco barn in Virginia, travelers will delight in the often-bucolic landscape and the scintillating history it hosts.

Ford's Theatre 511 10th St NW, Washington, D.C. On the morning of April 14, Booth learned that Abraham Lincoln and his wife, Mary Todd, would attend a performance of "Our American Cousin" that night at Ford's Theatre—a theater at which Booth had frequently performed. About 10:15 p.m.,

when the production reached a particularly amusing scene often met with audience laughter, Booth entered the presidential box and shot Lincoln in the back of the head, mortally wounding him. When Major Henry Rathbone, a guest of the Lincolns, lunged at Booth, he stabbed Rathbone, then jumped to the stage from the presidential box. His flight to freedom had just begun. Ford's Theatre has been restored to its historic appearance and still holds productions, tours, and houses a museum on the bottom floor. www.fords.org (Sean Pavone/Alamy Stock Photo)

Surratt House Museum 9118 Brandywine Rd., Clinton, Md. At midnight on April 14, Booth and Herold arrived at the Surratt Tavern, owned and operated by Confederate sympathizers Mary Surratt and her son, John Surratt Jr., a friend of John Wilkes Booth. Herold and Booth retrieved weapons and supplies stashed here and quickly set off on their way. Mary Surratt's tenant gave damning testimony that sent her to the gallows on July 7, 1865, as one of Booth's co-conspirators in the assassination plot. She was the first woman executed by the federal government. Her son was tried but ultimately acquitted. The tavern has been preserved as a museum and historic site. www.surrattmuseum.org (Melissa A. Winn)

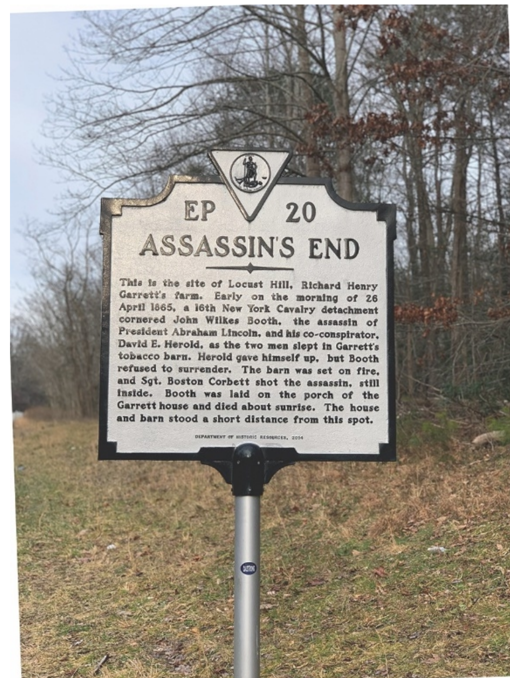
Mudd House Museum 3725 Dr. Samuel Mudd Rd., Waldorf, Md. At 4 a.m. on April 15, as Lincoln lay dying at the Petersen House across the street from Ford's Theatre, Booth and Herold arrived at the home of Dr. Samuel Mudd. Booth asked Mudd to set his leg, which he broke during his escape from Washington. As Booth and Herold rested in an upstairs room, Mudd traveled into nearby Bryantown to run errands. When he returned, the two had fled. Today, the house serves as a museum. Behind it, you can walk the footpath through the 200-acre farmstead that Booth and Herold took into the Zekiah Swamp as they headed toward the Potomac River. www.drmudd.org (Melissa A. Winn)

St. Mary's Church 13715 Notre Dame Pl., Bryantown, Md. The plot to assassinate President Lincoln began in the same places

where the manhunt for Booth would take place. Here at St. Mary's Church, Dr. Mudd first met Booth in 1864. Booth had come to Bryantown to recruit men to help him kidnap the president. Booth and Mudd met several more times before the doctor set his broken leg at Mudd's home on April 15, 1865. The Mudds are buried in the church cemetery. (Melissa A. Winn)

Pine Thicket 9695 Bel Alton Newtown Rd., Bel Alton, Md. While the manhunt for Booth and Herold grew close, the pair hid in this pine thicket waiting for a chance to safely cross over to Virginia. Locals brought them food, drink, and newspapers, which revealed to the disgruntled Booth that he was not being hailed as the hero he had hoped, but instead as a monstrous villain. Booth lamented in his pocket diary, "Our country owed all her troubles to him, and God simply made me the instrument of his punishment." On April 20, their local guides led them down to the Potomac River to cross into Virginia. (Melissa A. Winn)

Crossing the Potomac 11495 Popes Creek Rd., Newburg, Md. On the night of April 20, Booth and Herold stood here with Confederate signal agent Thomas Jones, who had secured them a rowboat to cross the river. Before pushing the fugitives off into the darkness, Jones recommended they cross the river to Mathias Point and then downstream to Machodoc Creek and the home of Elizabeth Quesenberry. Disoriented, the pair did not reach Virginia that night. Instead, they rowed into Nanjemoy Creek, Md., spent the next day resting, and set off for Virginia again. (Melissa A. Winn)



Garrett Farm Site John Wilkes Booth's flight from justice ended at the Richard

Garrett Farm, south of Port Royal, on April 26, 1865. The 16th New York Cavalry, acting on a tip, found Booth and Herold hidden in a tobacco barn there. Herold surren- dered, but Booth refused, even after the troopers set the barn afire to flush him out. Booth was shot in the neck by Sergeant Thomas P. "Boston" Corbett. He was then dragged out of the burning barn, dying at the farmhouse three hours later. The Garrett Farm buildings are long gone, and the site, part of Fort A.P. Hill, is not accessible to the public. (Melissa A. Winn)

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Regulating Venus

This fascinating image shows individuals in the laundry yard of a hospital for prostitutes on 2nd Street in Nashville, Note the shirt-sleeved guard at support arms just to the left of this caption.an the women in the foreground are likely patients. Courtesy of the Tennessee State Library and Archives

Gordon Berg, HISTORYNET, October 2020

Faced with a rampant prostitution crisis in Nashville, the U.S. Army tried a bold social experiment

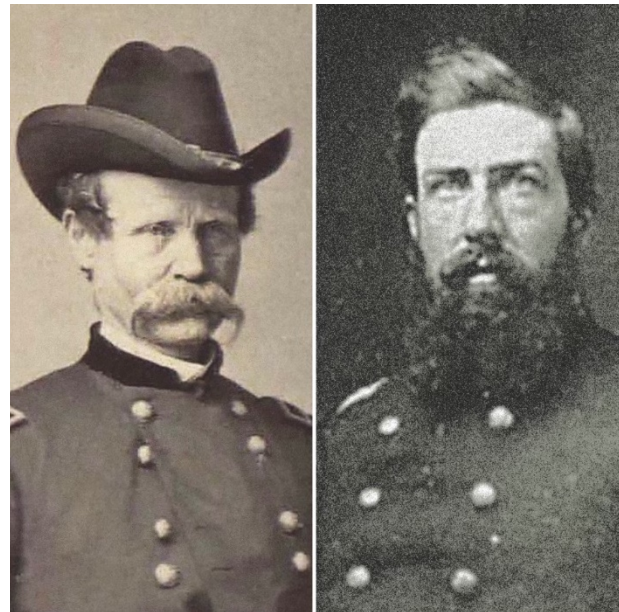
Even before the war, Nashville had a flourishing skin trade. The 1860 census counted 207 Nashville women admitting to prostitution as their livelihood—198 white and nine mulatto. The city fathers recognized they had a problem but were unable to agree on a solution. Thankfully, most of the trade was confined to bawdy houses; most of them were little better than two-room shanties known as cribs. Some abodes, however, were luxurious, probably catering to a higher class of clients. Best-of-the best was a house run by sisters Rebecca and Eliza Higgins. It was valued at $24,000 with 28 people, including 17 prostitutes, living there. Not far behind was Martha Reeder's house. She had personal property valued at $15,000, making her one of the city's wealthier citizens. Mag Seats' house specialized in adolescent sex, but the typical Nashville prostitute was about 30, widowed, and had small children.

As the Union garrison swelled to more than 30,000, so did the number of prostitutes. By the summer of 1862, some estimated the number of "public women" in Nashville to number nearly 1,500, and they were always busy. While many were eager to relieve the soldiers of their money, most came out of desperation. Nashville offered them an environment safe from armed marauders, ample food at stable prices, and a chance to take care of themselves—and often their children—without benefit of a male provider. Nearly all of Nashville's prostitutes were associated with a bordello; few plied their trade as individual street walkers. This gave many women from isolated rural farms their first experience of a supportive community of their peers.

Nashville was a main base for the U.S. Army's Western Theater campaigns, and the city was overwhelmed by Union troops. (Library of Congress)

Where prostitutes saw opportunity, civic leaders and military officials saw a growing problem. Benton E. Dubbs, an Ohio private, recalled a saying among the troops that no man could be a soldier unless he had passed through Smokey Row. Even with a burgeoning clientele, competition for customers was far from friendly. Nashville's three newspapers regularly carried stories of internecine strife such as "Mattie Smith, Mary Morgan, Jane Morgan, and Alice Hoffman were fined $5 each for sending a crowd of soldiers to clear out Martha Carson's house." Or "Sally Mosely, Ada Wyatt, and Ellen Pinson sent a body of soldiers into Mary Morgan's to 'cut up and run around' for which they were fined $5 each." The *Nashville Dispatch* opined, "If the Provost Marshall would send a squad of his men down there some fine night and place in jail every man they find there, it would be a wholesome lesson to others to keep out of such company."

Brigadier General Robert S. Granger, the garrison commander, knew the provost guard couldn't jail all the offending soldiers. But neither fines, threats of jail, nor appeals to moral conscience stemmed the flourishing trade. So Granger tried the Army way. He would round up the women and ship them out of town. The task fell to provost marshal Lt. Col. George Spalding of the 18th Michigan Infantry. In December 1862, Spalding's men scooped up all the prostitutes they could—the exact number varies—and put them on a train for Louisville. But the women found far fewer prospective clients in the smaller garrison there and quickly made their way back to Nashville. By summertime, Nashville's problem was getting worse and more obvious. As the temperature rose, the women of pleasure advertised by wearing fewer and fewer clothes.

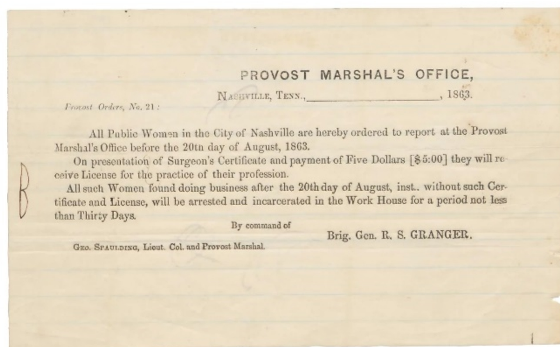


From left: Brig. Gen. Robert Granger; Lt. Col. George Spalding. (USAHEC)

So, on July 6, 1863, Granger issued Special Orders No. 29 authorizing Spalding "without loss of time to seize and transport to Louisville all prostitutes found in this city or known to be here…." The *Nashville Dispatch* reported "General Granger has given notice to a large number of women of the town that

they must prepare to leave Nashville. It is said they are demoralizing the army and that their removal is a military necessity." Spalding again led soldiers and police officers on raids of the city's brothels, "heaping furniture out of the various dens, and then tumbling their disconsolate owners after." The roundup lasted all month. But, having failed by rail, Spalding now included the river as an additional avenue of expulsion.

That decision was bad news for John Newcomb. As captain of the *Idahoe*, a new side-wheeled steamer chartered to the army, he hoped to take advantage of lucrative contracts hauling military cargo. But Newcomb couldn't have expected that his first consignment order would read, "You are hereby directed to proceed to Louisville, Kentucky, with the 100 passengers put on board your steamer today, allowing none to leave the Boat before reaching Louisville."
The *Dispatch* reported "a boat was chartered by the government for the especial service of deporting the 'sinful fair' to a point where they can exert less mischief…." Newcomb protested but to no avail and the Idahoe would henceforth be known as "The Floating Whorehouse."



PROVOST MARSHAL'S OFFICE,

NASHVILLE, TENN., ______________, 1863.

Provost Orders, No. 21:

All Public Women in the City of Nashville are hereby ordered to report at the Provost Marshal's Office before the 20th day of August, 1863.

On presentation of Surgeon's Certificate and payment of Five Dollars [$5:00] they will receive License for the practice of their profession.

All such Women found doing business after the 20th day of August, inst., without such Certificate and License, will be arrested and incarcerated in the Work House for a period not less than Thirty Days.

By command of
Brig. Gen. R. S. GRANGER.

GEO. SPAULDING, Lieut. Col. and Provost Marshal.

A copy of the order distributed by Granger and Spalding requiring prostitutes in Nashville to be licensed. (National Archives)

Newcomb and the *Idahoe* began their fateful voyage north on July 8. Again, the exact number of passengers varies. When the *Idahoe* reached Louisville, it was met at the wharves by armed guards. Ordered to sail on, Newcomb continued up the Ohio River, finally docking at Cincinnati on July 17. The city fathers there had heard the *Idahoe* was coming and what it was carrying. They, too, pulled up the welcome mat. Reported the Cincinnati *Daily Gazette*,
"The *Idahoe* came up, bringing a cargo of 150 of the frail sisterhood of Nashville, who had been sent north by military orders. There does not seem to be much desire on the part of our authorities to welcome such a large addition to the already over-flowing numbers engaged in their peculiar profession…."

Newcomb became desperate; he was out of provisions and his ship was being destroyed by his unhappy and increasingly unruly passengers. For two weeks, the *Idahoe* bobbed in limbo while Newcomb frantically telegraphed Washington, D.C., for instructions. The matter came before Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton who ordered the ill-fated ship back to Nashville.
The *Dispatch* reported that crowds of people gathered at the wharf, jostling each other "for the purpose of looking at the steamer which carried out and brought back the precious freight." By August 5, the voyage of the damned was back where it started, the women went back to work, and the army had an even bigger problem on its hands.

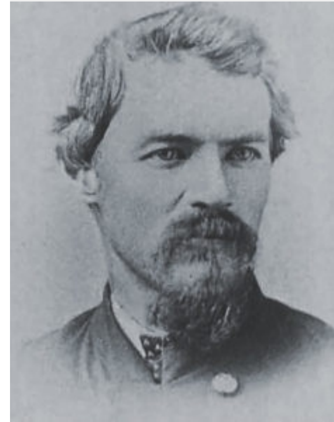
It seems that while their white sisters were embarked on their riverine odyssey, black women surged into Nashville to meet the continuing demand for paid pleasure. The Nashville *Daily*

Press thundered, "Unless the aggravated curse of lechery as it exists among the negresses of this town is destroyed by rigid military or civil mandates, or the indiscriminate expulsion of the guilty sex, the ejectment of the white class will turn out to have been productive of the sin it was intended to eradicate….No city…has been more shamefully abused by the conduct of its unchaste female population, white or black, than has Nashville…for the past eighteen months….We trust that, while in the humor of ridding our town of libidinous white women, General Granger will dispose of the hundreds of black ones who are making our fair city a Gomorrah."

Now under intense pressure from his superiors, the ever resourceful Lt. Col. Spalding seemingly had an epiphany. Drawing on the strict Presbyterian discipline he learned as a child, Spalding decided if he couldn't defeat the women, he would legalize them. And so began the army's unprecedented program to turn a civic vice into a public virtue benefiting the citizens of Nashville, the soldiers garrisoning the city, and the women who plied a trade that defied eradication.

Desperate for anything that might alleviate the growing clamor for action, Granger quickly approved Spalding's plan. It had four parts. First, each prostitute would be issued a license costing $5 and have her address recorded by the provost authorities. Second, an army surgeon would give each woman a medical examination; only healthy women would be certified to practice their trade legally. Certificates would cost 50 cents per visit; it would soon be raised to $1. Third, diseased women would be sent to a special hospital reserved for their treatment and pay a 50-cent weekly tax for its upkeep. Finally, any woman found practicing her trade without a health certificate was subject to incarceration in the workhouse for 30 days. All "public women" were told to report for examination by August 17 or face 30 days in the city jail.

A John Named Tom?



On May 4, 1864, Captain Thomas Taylor of the 47th Ohio Infantry wrote in his diary, "Gay time—dinner at Carr City—Much whiskey—plenty of spirit, little wit, and less sense. Reached Nashville little before sundown and stopped at City Hotel—visited College Street." The reference to "College Street" is interesting, as that thoroughfare was in the midst of "Smokey Row," Nashville's red light district, and it is possible Taylor was making an allusion to frequenting a prostitute. Of course, he might have gone down there to have a meal and a drink…but that certainly wasn't the primary reason most soldiers "visited" that section of town. –D.B.S.

At first, prostitutes were required to report to the surgeon's office every fortnight, but Dr. William M. Chambers, head of the Board of Examination, soon required check-ups every 10 days in order to treat infectious sex workers more

promptly. In his January 31, 1865, report, Chambers described how the procedure worked. The prostitutes “enter a reception room which is comfortably furnished and in cold or disagreeable weather well heated. They pass in time from this apartment into an adjoining examination room in which there are a bed, a table, and all the necessary appliances for examining them.” Women who passed the exam received certificates and a figurative public seal of approval. Those not certified were promptly hospitalized.

The Union Army operated 23 hospitals in Nashville. Hospital No. 11, a sturdy brick building on North Market Street that ironically had once been the residence of the Catholic bishop of Nashville, became the “Female Venereal Hospital” also known as “The Pest House.” It had a comfortably furnished living room paid for by examination fees, a treatment room, and two wards of 10 beds each. Black female matrons recruited from the nearby contraband camp did the cooking and a black man was hired to do any necessary manual labor.

Armed guards prevented anyone from entering the premises unless accompanied by the resident physician, Dr. Robert Fletcher of the U.S. Volunteers. Appraising the hastily devised program a year after its inception, Dr. Fletcher concluded “after the attempt to reduce disease by forcible expulsion of prostitutes had, as it always had, utterly failed, the more philosophic plan of recognizing and controlling an ineradicable evil has met with undoubted success.”

The numbers support Dr. Fletcher’s conclusion. By the end of the first week, the provost marshal’s report showed 123 women examined and licensed. Twelve women were admitted to the hospital during the first month of operation; 28 more during the following two months. By January 1864, licensed prostitutes numbered 352, 60 of whom were diseased and admitted to the hospital. By August 1864, the number had risen to 456 and officials expanded the registration program to include 50 black prostitutes. By the end of January 1865, the Female Venereal Hospital had treated 207 women. Patients were not allowed to leave until “perfectly cured;” then they were allowed to “return to duty.” Dr. Chambers also made house calls for an additional fee of one dollar.

Hospital 11 nicknamed “The Pest House,” was dedicated to patients with venereal disease. Admissions spiked in February 1864 when furloughed troops returned. (Courtesy of the Tennessee State Library and Archives)

The Nashville experiment also seemed to refine the appearance and conduct of the women. “When the inspections were first enforced many [prostitutes] were exceedingly filthy in their persons and apparel and obscene and coarse in their language,” Dr. Fletcher reported, “but this soon gave place to cleanliness and propriety.” Dr. Chambers observed that many prostitutes “gladly exhibit to their visitors the ‘certificate’ when it is asked for….” Military officials attributed some of the increasing number of registered prostitutes and those seeking treatment to the popularity of Spalding’s order. In fact, they ascribed part of the increasing number of registered prostitutes to an influx of women from other areas who learned that conditions in Nashville were safer and healthier. Civilian authorities raised little opposition to the program. As proof, the city council voted to defer all regulation and enforcement of what was now a legal part of Nashville’s civic life to the military authorities.

But what about the soldiers? Spalding’s regulations were enacted primarily to improve the health and unit preparedness of the garrison. In February 1864, Hospital No. 15, a three-story brick building on Line Street, was converted into a facility for soldiers’ venereal cases only. Surgeons at the 140 bed facility admitted more than 2,300 cases by the end of the year, but only 30 had been infected while in Nashville. It seems that a large number of veterans returning from home leave or reenlistment came through town during that same period and brought their afflictions with them. Dr. Fletcher acknowledged that the cooperation of the garrison’s officers was vital to the program’s success, writing “When a soldier of the post forces is infected, it is not uncommon for his captain to report the case, with the name of the suspected woman, who is immediately arrested and examined.” Of course, officers themselves were not immune to the allure of illicit flesh. Before Spalding’s edict went into effect, 20-30 officers per month were treated for venereal diseases; after, the number dropped to one or two.

The end of the war brought an end to Nashville’s bold social experiment. The regiments garrisoned there dispersed and mustered out. Colonel Spalding returned to Michigan where he served as postmaster and mayor of Monroe, studied law, and served two terms in Congress from 1895-1899. He died in 1907. Dr. Fletcher went to Washington, D.C., where he wrote and edited numerous medical publications for the Office of the Surgeon General. He also made significant contributions to the study of anthropology and the history of medicine. He died in 1912. William Chambers returned to Charleston, Ill., and practiced medicine there until he died in 1892.

It took two years for John Newcomb, captain of the star-crossed *Idahoe*, to receive about $5,000 from the Treasury Department for damages to his ship and expenses he incurred while transporting his human cargo. And what of the women of Nashville, without whom this most unusual medical experiment would not have been possible? They disappeared into history’s shadows, unknown and unrecognized.

Frequent Civil War Times contributor Gordon Berg writes from Gaithersburg, Md.

The Food That Fueled the Civil War and Built America

Kim Coons, NPS, May 7, 2021

On Saturday, May 22, at 2 pm, Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park invites you to participate in a virtual program examining the food Civil War soldiers were issued and ate, while then looking at how the country transitioned into mass food production to contend with the growing population. This program will be accessible on the park's Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/chickamauganps) and YouTube Channel (www.youtube.com/chchnps). Instructions on accessing an audio described version of the program will be provided on the park's social media platforms as well.

Did you know some of the same foods that we consume today had their origins in companies dating back to the Civil War? Immediately after the Civil War, during this period of the Industrial Revolution, many of the iconic brands that we know of and purchase in supermarkets and grocery stores began as simple ideas from individuals with dreams of making products that had a lasting impact on our society. We hope you can join us as we explore the history of some of your favorite food and drinks and their legacies on today's world markets.

For more information about programs at Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, contact the Chickamauga Battlefield Visitor Center at 706-866-9241, the Lookout Mountain Battlefield Visitor Center at 423-821-7786, or visit the park website at www.nps.gov/chch.

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Eve of War: Williamsburg

Bert Dunkerly, April 19, 2021
blueandgrayeducation.org

An illustration of Williamsburg in 1862 by a Union soldier | LOC

With the move of the capital to Richmond during the Revolution, the once-thriving colonial capital of Williamsburg fell into a long and steady decline. Although it had a college and mental hospital, the town had little industry or other large businesses. It was not situated on a major river, and there was no bank or public school. Lacking the telegraph and a railroad connection, it was cut off from the rest of the world, as a town would be today without internet access.

In 1860, Williamsburg had 1,895 residents, with 864 black and 1,031 white. Of the 864 African Americans, 743 of them were enslaved and 121 were free. The free black population included several oystermen, house servants, shoemakers, and watermen.

Among the white population were a number of mechanics and farmers, as well as lawyers and clerks, no doubt because it was the county seat. The Lunatic Asylum, as it was known, was a large employer; today it is Eastern State Hospital. There were also several merchants and coach makers.

Colonial Landmarks

As war approached, the former capital of Virginia still had many tangible remnants of its colonial past.

As the county seat of James City County, the courthouse stood (and still stands) at the center of town.

The College of William and Mary, founded in 1693, rose at the town's eastern end. A fire had badly damaged the Wren Building in 1859, but it was repaired and classes were in session again.

The old Powder Magazine, which had supplied Virginia forces in the French and Indian War, Revolution, and War of 1812, still stood, surrounded by newer buildings.

Bruton Parish Church, built in 1715, was a prominent landmark, and nearby stood the ruins of the outbuildings from the Governor's Palace.

The James City County courthouse, the same building seen today in the heart of the restored area, was an important place of business.

Eastern Lunatic Asylum, which had origins before the Revolution, still survives as a state institution.

Williamsburg's colonial powder magazine next to city hall in the center of town | courtesy of the author

The People

The coming war would touch many local families. Occupying a prominent house on Main Street (that still stands) was the family of Lemuel Bowden, a Unionist who opposed secession. He was a lawyer and president of the board of the Lunatic Asylum.

A little farther down Main Street lived the Barziza family, whose son Decimus et Ultimus had moved to Texas in 1857. When war broke out he enlisted there, and found himself retreating from Union forces with the Texas Brigade in front of his family home in 1862.

In the 1750s, Peter Pelham served as the organist at Bruton Parish Church, as well as the jail keeper. His grandson, John Pelham, would travel with his artillery down Main Street in front of the church in 1862. Later, he was known as the Gallant Pelham.

For 18 years, German immigrant Charles Frederic Ernest Minnegrode taught at the College and became an Episcopal minister. He introduced the Christmas tree to his Williamsburg neighbors, and in 1856 went to serve at St. Paul's Church in Richmond, where he would later baptize Jefferson Davis.

The white residents of the community were overwhelmingly pro-secession. In fact, brothers Edward and Robert Lively, publishers of the town's only newspaper, the *Weekly Gazette* and *Eastern Virginia Advertiser,* raised a secessionist flag over their house and printing shop at the western end of Main Street, now the pedestrian area of Merchant's Square. Today the paper survives as the *Virginia Gazette.*

Decimus et Ultimus Barziza | LOC

War Time

When war came, enlistments in the military quickly depleted the student body at the College of William and Mary. Student Richard A. Wise wrote to his father, former governor Henry A. Wise, on January 9, 1861: “The students here have organized a military company, and elected ‘Old Buck’ their captain, their uniform is to be home spun pantaloons and a red flannel shirt and fatigue cap. I have joined, but do not intend to get a uniform for if there is any fighting, I am going home and go along with you. The company is to be armed with bowie knives and double barreled shot guns, or rifles, if with shot guns, they are to be loaded with buck shot in case of action …”

Subsequently, on May 10, 1861, the faculty closed the school for the duration of the conflict. The College Building (Wren Building) was used as a Confederate barracks and later as a hospital, first by Confederate, and later Union forces. The town would experience battle many times, and remain on the front lines for the rest of the war. One battle was fought on its eastern edge in 1862, and two more through town a year later. Union troops occupied the town for most of the war and the local men who joined the 32nd Virginia could never return home until after the conflict.

Battle of Williamsburg in 1862 | LOC

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