



THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

Charles City, Va. records taken by Union soldiers during Civil War are now returned

By KATHERINE CALOS Richmond Times-Dispatch, August 4, 2016

Nearly 300 pages of Charles City County records that were pilfered by Union soldiers during the Civil War have returned to Virginia — filling in some of the blanks on wills, deeds and other court filings from the 1600s.

"It's a godsend, an absolute godsend," said John Metz, deputy of collections and programs at the Library of Virginia. "I'm a historian. This is the kind of thing we live for."

"This is remarkable," said Judith Ledbetter, historian with the Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History in Charles City. "Except for the 10 pages that the library already had of this book, it's pretty much the earliest we have of Charles City records that would be complete deeds and wills."

The recovered pages, numbered from 188 to 486 from a single book, cover the period from 1694 through 1700. Signatures on the laid rag paper in the book include many of the notable names in early American history, such as William Byrd, Benjamin Harrison Sr. and Capt. William Randolph.

Charles City was settled in 1613 and was one of four original boroughs created by the Great Charter delivered to Jamestown in 1618. Its records were among the oldest in the country when Union soldiers ransacked the courthouse in August 1862.

The New York Times reported on Aug. 20, 1862, that in Charles City, the records of real estate titles and other papers "have been wantonly scattered in confusion about the premises, covering the floors and

dooryards, and are almost wholly destroyed. A more impressive exhibition of the destructive effects of war could scarcely be imagined, than to see those old and cherished books of record and title papers scattered to the winds or trodden under foot."

On Aug. 15, the 154th anniversary of the day the records were carried away, local and state officials will meet at 10 a.m. in front of the old Charles City courthouse to celebrate the documents' return.



Photo- James Wallach – Times/Dispatch

The papers were preserved in recent decades by three generations of the Urbania family in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The late Karl Urbania, a machinist, had bought them from an antiques dealer at some point, said Evan Urbania, his grandson.

"It was stored for so many years in a large shirt box in my father's closet," Evan Urbania said. Paul Urbania, Evan's father, was a lawyer who "enjoyed reading through it and comparing it to history."

"My dad showed it to me as a child," Urbania said. "We figured out it was court records. At some point, we all looked at each other and said, 'This needs to go back where it belongs.'"

Urbania took the records to Philadelphia, where he lives, and connected with Nathan Raab, a historical document dealer at the Raab Collection. Raab recalled the conversation starting out like many

others regarding the value of a document.

"Probably within 24 hours, I had a sense that this was special and different. It had a lot of information that scholars would die to get at," Raab said.

"The family was ready to find it the right home." Neither the family nor Raab made any money on the donation, Raab said.

Charles City is among about 20 Virginia counties whose records were destroyed during the war, some by fire after they were sent to Richmond for safekeeping and others by marauding troops.

Thousands of Union troops were quartered in Charles City for 45 days in 1862 at the end of the Union Army's unsuccessful Peninsula Campaign, said John Coski, historian at the American Civil War Museum.

"The irony, if you will, (is) a lot of Union soldiers were impressed with the history, to be in Virginia where the nation began," Coski said. "For every soldier who ransacked, there was another who treated it with a certain amount of reverence.

"There were men of conscience who hated to see it happen. They tried to make sense of it and explain it away as the fortunes of war. ... 'Such is war, and we didn't start it.'"

The records will be conserved to clean and repair pages that haven't been properly protected for more than 150 years. After that, they will be scanned to make them available to the public and research community, probably by December, said Metz, with the Library of Virginia.

Edward Mitchell of Charles City is already planning to look for some answers about his ancestral home. It has been owned continuously by Katherine Banks Royall Isham and her descendants for 375 years but



THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

has taken some unexplained detours from one side of the family to the other.

"How did Joseph (Royall) Jr. get the property back from his Isham half-sisters? Was it given to him by the sisters? Did he buy it? Or maybe they left it in their respective wills?" Mitchell said in an email.

The answers should be easy to read, if they're in the section that was recovered. The pages are in great condition, considering what they've been through, said Vince Brooks, senior local records archivist at the Library of Virginia.

"I've seen many in the courthouse that were properly stored that look worse," Brooks said.

A copy of the digitized records will go to the Urbania family.

"It's through the good grace and generosity of people like the Urbania family, and through the incredible good nature and good will of Nathan Raab and his company," that items like these pilfered records "make their way back to where they belong," Metz said.

"We're hoping a story like this gets people to look at what they've got and make sure these items make their way back to the right home, where a larger group of people can benefit from them."

How the American Civil War Built Egypt's Vaunted Cotton Industry and Changed the Country Forever

The battle between the U.S. and the Confederacy affected global trade in astonishing ways

By Peter Schwartzstein,
smithsonian.com, August 1, 2016

When Confederate artillery opened up on the Union garrison at Fort

Sumter in Charleston Harbor on April 12, 1861, it marked the beginning of an exceptionally bleak chapter in U.S. history.

Over the next four years, roughly 700,000 Americans were killed, and millions of others were injured or made destitute. The south was reduced to a weakened state ravaged by war and no longer able to thrive on the free labor provided by the pernicious institution of slavery.

But for a number of fledgling countries and colonies across the world, America's loss was their great gain.

As northern warships blockaded southern ports, closing them off to commercial shipping, the cotton plantations of the Confederacy struggled to export their 'white gold.' With the great textile mills of England now deprived of the lifeblood of their industry, 80 percent of which had previously come from the U.S, the price of cotton very soon went through the roof. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, birthed in Britain, the United States and its former antagonist and overlord had symbiotically thrived on the massive revenues from the cotton trade, a titan of commerce reliant on the lives of the American South's enslaved population. Now, the Civil War imperiled everything for the moneymakers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

It took just a couple of weeks after the outbreak of hostilities in South Carolina for farmers the world over to realize the scope of the bounty that had landed in their lap. Agricultural laborers from Australia and India to the West Indies ditched wheat and other food staples and hastily planted up their fields with cotton. Prices had risen by up to 150 percent. As soon as it became clear that England wouldn't enter the war as allies of the

Confederacy, many farmers doubled down and gave over every scrap of their acreage to this enriching crop.

No one, however, seized on the opportunity quite like the Egyptians, who had just a few decades beforehand freed themselves from almost 300 years of direct Ottoman rule. Under the ambitious leadership of Muhammed Ali, an Albanian soldier who had seized power in 1805 and is widely considered the founder of modern Egypt, the country had already embraced cotton as a valuable cash crop. The discovery 40 years beforehand of a fine long-staple variety by a visiting French engineer – a Monsieur Jumel – meant that Egypt was also well on its way to building a reputation for high-quality cotton, which linen-makers rave about to this day.

But now, with prices continuing to soar and desperation high in northern England as the mills of Manchester exhausted the excess supply left over from a bumper American harvest of 1860, authorities in Cairo moved with extraordinary speed to ramp up additional production.

In 1861, Egypt had only exported 600,000 cantars of cotton (a traditional measurement equal to about 100 pounds), but by 1863 it had more than doubled this to almost 1.3 million cantars, the New York Times reported at the time. By the end of the 19th century, Egypt derived 93 percent of its export revenues from cotton, which had also become "the major source of income for almost every proprietor in the Delta," writes Roger Owen in *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy*.

Egypt goes forward – and backwards

Looking back, it might seem as if there were a certainly inevitability to Egypt's capture of much of the



THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

American market share. With its foothold on the Mediterranean, it was much closer to Liverpool than its competitors, and to the ports at Marseille and Trieste, through which France and the Austro-Hungarian Empire funneled cotton north to their mills. And certainly few countries could rival the Nile Valley and Delta, once considered the breadbasket of the Roman Empire, for sheer agricultural pedigree.

But it was above all through the force of will of Khedive Ismail, Muhammad Ali's equally driven grandson, that things really took off.

After assuming the throne in 1863, he presided over a massive program of public works, which included building much of the network of irrigation canals that farmers use to this day, and continuing his father's embrace of modern technology. In the 1850s, Egypt had become the first country outside Europe or the United States to have a railway, and Ismail pushed its expansion – and that of the telegram lines – well beyond Cairo and Alexandria. So determined was he to satisfy the needs of European cloth merchants that he even commandeered Nile barges to transport cotton downriver to the sea when floods temporarily cut off the railway tracks in 1863.

Initially, at least, it wasn't just the landowning and mercantile classes who benefited from this extraordinary boon. With their unexpected new prosperity, some villagers paid dowries or went on the pilgrimage to Mecca. "Others built houses; others again purchased silks, jewelry, silver, pipes, furniture and slaves," writes Owen.

But as the trade evolved, and cotton morphed into even more of a money-spinning opportunity, life for

the *fellaheen* (peasants) took an unpleasant turn for the worse.

For just as the expansion in the trafficking of slaves to the southern United States is often explained in part by the pick up in cotton production, so too the arrival of this tremendously labor intensive crop in Egypt led to the introduction of a variation of the feudal system. Farmers who had previously spent much of their time planting land that was for all intents and purposes theirs, now found themselves pressed into work on large estates. Where once poorer townspeople had had access to cheap produce, soon they discovered that the cultivation of cotton at the expense of food meant much higher prices for fruits and vegetables.

"It explains child labor, it created seasonal labor [during the harvest]," says Mona Abaza, a professor at the American University in Cairo, whose book *The Cotton Plantation Remembered* recounts how her family built up great wealth through cotton. "It was very exploitative and is hard to look back at with any sentimentality."

Cotton and Colonization

Unsurprisingly, Egypt's newfound riches didn't escape the attention of enterprising tradespeople across Europe or the Levant either, many of whom were keen to share in the cotton spoils. Between February and August 1864 alone, 12,000 more foreigners arrived than left, Owen writes, with Greeks the largest group among them. Intent on securing business for their nationals, European governments rushed to open up missions throughout the Delta and Upper Egypt. Even Minya, a now struggling and somewhat isolated city to the south of Cairo,

once boasted a U.S consulate due to its proximity to valuable cotton stocks.

This influx was in itself not terrible as the foreigners brought with them considerable expertise to a country still clawing its way back from centuries of stagnation. They also orchestrated much of the redevelopment of Alexandria, which had slumped badly in size and grandeur since the days of Cleopatra and the Ptolemies, and financed the construction of several Cairo neighborhoods, whose names still hark back to their cotton baron patrons.

But their arrival also coincided – and indirectly contributed – to a rash of poor decision-making among Egypt's ruling classes that was to eventually lead to the arrival of the British military on a long-term basis in 1882. Ismail was so intent on building up cotton infrastructure and transforming Cairo into a 'Paris on the Nile' that he encouraged the "establishment of banks like the Anglo-Egyptian from which he might borrow heavily in return for certain favors," writes Owen. Very soon he'd built up such big debts to mostly British and French creditors that he couldn't hope to ever pay them back. Additionally, the end of the American Civil War in 1865 led to a steep fall in global cotton prices as the U.S. crop came back on the market and proved particularly damaging for Egypt. It created a sharp budget deficit and ultimately a declaration of national bankruptcy a decade later

"I think you can say that the American Civil War – and the effects on cotton – made the British change their policy towards Egypt," says Mohamed Awad, director of the Alexandria & Mediterranean Research Center at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. "Indirectly it was one of



THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

the main reasons for the occupation of Egypt."

As the overwhelmed Egyptian treasury bounded from one crisis to another, the European and Syro-Lebanese communities set about snapping up much of the cotton trade. By the time the Egyptian monarchy came crashing down in 1952, only two of the 35 registered cotton brokers at the Alexandria stock exchange were Egyptian, according to Samir Raafat, a Cairo historian.

Egyptian cotton on its last legs

Nowadays the great Egyptian cotton industry is a pale shadow of its former self. Very little of the celebrated long-staple cotton is still grown, and when it is, the country's own textile mills are no longer equipped to process it. The few remaining cotton plants of the Delta have completely given themselves over to dealing with the imported short-staple forms of the crop. But the stellar reputation of Egyptian cotton still holds, even though in the United States, linen manufacturers can use the name on products with just five percent of the Egyptian crop

Remains of Civil War veteran returned home

Transported from Oregon to Maine, WMUR.com, August 21, 2016

PORTSMOUTH, N.H. —The remains of a Civil War veteran passed through New Hampshire Sunday as he made his final trip home to Maine.

Pvt. Jewett Williams was part of the 20th Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

His remains had been at the Oregon State Hospital since 1922 when he passed away at the age of 78.

His family never claimed his body and now he has no known relatives.

Williams' remains were taken across the country by the Patriot Guard Riders. The journey began Aug. 1

and ended on Sunday after crossing 19 states to get to Maine.

"As a fellow veteran I believe we have to pay respect to all of our veterans, past, present or future and this is my way of giving back to them," said David Lange.

Lange was among a group riding with the Patriot Guard Riders.

"The Patriot Guard Riders have essentially set up a modern-day pony express to get him from Oregon back to Maine," said Nick Marks, the Ride Captain.

Marks, also a veteran, walked the remains across the Memorial Bridge in Portsmouth to the John Paul Jones park in Kittery. Dozens gathered there for a ceremony.

"Each of the New England states have held tributes, they have been tremendous," Maine historian Tom Desjardin said. "Firefighters on overpasses in new Jersey, New Hampshire, and Maine, there has really been an outpouring of interest." Desjardin was the one who discovered where Williams' remains were being stored after doing some research.

"I found it and I saw the adjutant general, the head of veteran services, at a meeting and I said, 'I found this guy in Oregon' and they said 'Let's bring him home,'" Desjardin said. "And then when the Patriot Guard Riders got involved it became this super story and effort."

He said Williams was drafted in 1864 and served for the last six months of the Civil War.

"He saw a number of battles of combat and he was there at the end," Desjardin said. "He was present at Appomattox when his commanding officer, Joshua Chamberlain, accepted the formal surrender of the Confederate army."

The funeral for Williams brings closure to the story of the 20th Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment

"The great thing is we are about to take part in and plan for the last funeral ever of the 20th Maine, which is an unusual thing, the last funeral was in 1935," Desjardin said.

Williams will be buried in the Togas National Cemetery in Maine on Sept. 17.

Most of Perryville Battlefield is preserved with latest 70-acre purchase

BY GREG KOCHER, LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER, July 25, 2016

The Civil War Trust on Monday said it has preserved three properties totaling 70 acres associated with the 1862 Battle of Perryville.

Some of the Boyle County land was purchased as the result of a national fund-raising campaign conducted by the Trust earlier this year, and some acreage was donated by a private property owner. With the addition of these 70 acres on the northern part of the battlefield, the Trust has helped save 1,027 acres at Perryville, the site of Kentucky's largest and bloodiest Civil War battle.

"Complete preservation of a battlefield is the Civil War Trust's ultimate goal, the finest example of our mission at work," said Trust President James Lighthizer in a release. "This victory at Perryville brings us within spitting distance of finishing our work there. Thanks to the generous contributions of our members, future generations of Americans will have the opportunity to visit this site and reflect on the sacrifices made."

The tracts were purchased for \$736,000 using grants from the National Park Service's American



THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

Battlefield Protection Program. The Trust raised \$297,500 in donations from members.

"The greatest achievement that we can accomplish is to completely preserve a battlefield or preserve all of the land that is still possible to preserve," said Meg Martin of the Civil War Trust. "Perryville is one of the best examples of our mission at work. There's just a few parcels left, and then that will reach completion."

The amount of land that remained undeveloped since the Civil War at Perryville is rare to begin with, Martin said.

The latest preserved properties include a 430-foot long stone fence behind which Union Col. John Starkweather's brigade stopped the advance of Gen. Benjamin Cheatham's Confederate division, just 600 yards short of a Federal supply train.

The Trust's ultimate goal is to transfer the properties to Perryville Battlefield State Historic Site to enhance interpretation of the battle's closing, climactic stages. Martin did not know the timing of when that transfer will be complete.

The annual commemoration of the battle is Oct. 8-9. Advance tickets are available for sale through Oct. 5. To purchase advance tickets, visit: <http://parks.ky.gov/parks/historicsites/perryville-battlefield/reenactment-schedule.aspx>

In the summer of 1862, Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg launched an invasion of the key border state of Kentucky, hoping to divert Union attention from the Southern strongholds at Vicksburg and Chattanooga. The Battle of Perryville was a Confederate tactical victory, though the heavy fighting and bloodshed forced Bragg to retreat to Tennessee.

During the battle, the Confederates held an early advantage that they were able to exploit due to lack of communication among various elements of the Union force. Eventually reinforced, the Federal troops held their ground and pushed some of their attackers back into the town of Perryville itself. Confronted by a larger force and running low on supplies, Bragg withdrew toward Cumberland Gap. His army would never return to Kentucky.

The Civil War Trust is the largest and most effective nonprofit organization devoted to the preservation of America's battlegrounds. Although primarily focused on the protection of Civil War battlefields, through its Campaign 1776 initiative, the Trust also seeks to save the battlefields connected to the Revolutionary War and War of 1812. To date, the Trust has preserved nearly 43,000 acres of battlefield land in 23 states, including nearly 2,400 acres in Kentucky.

Civil War POW helped convict Andersonville commandant

Olean Times Herald, August 21, 2016
History buffs here are certainly aware of the contributions men from Cattaraugus and Allegany counties made in regiments fighting in the Civil War. But every once in awhile, we come across a specific story that is particularly noteworthy. This one comes from a copy we recently received of "An Early History of the Town of Portville, New York," published in 1976 by the Town of Portville Historical Society.

Among the many men to enlist in Olean area regiments were Edgar and George Irish, two brothers who were members of the 85th. On April 24, 1864, at Plymouth, N.C., after three days of bloody fighting, they

along with more than 500 enlisted men and officers surrendered to the Confederates.

They were sent to the infamous Andersonville Prison in Georgia, which amounted to a virtual death sentence for many Union soldiers. A total of 310 men from the 85th Regiment died as prisoners of war, the largest number of any regiment in the U.S., according to the Portville book.

But upon his arrival at Andersonville, "Edgar Irish had a stroke of luck," the book notes. "When the Confederates discovered that he was an excellent writer and bookkeeper he was given a job in the office. While there he was treated well and given nourishment while his comrades languished in the prison yards without sufficient food and water.

"Edgar was filled with anguish and worry about his younger brother whom he knew was somewhere among the thousands in the prison. After months of pleading with the Confederates he was at last allowed to try and find George. Unfortunately he was too late. George had died the day before of starvation and dysentery."

As noted in the Portville book, Edgar Irish had access to numerous incriminating records about the horrors of Andersonville. After the loss of his brother, it seems he was determined to make the nation aware of the awful conditions in the prison.

"He concealed the evidence on his person when he was released from prison. Later, this evidence was used at the trial against (the commandant of Andersonville, Henry Wirz)."

When the war ended, Wirz, a Swiss immigrant, was tried as war criminal and convicted; he was hanged on Nov. 10, 1865, near the U.S. Capitol in Washington.



THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

Edgar Irish, who returned to the Portville area after the war, is buried in the Obi Cemetery, located along Route 305 between Portville and West Clarksville. A monument to the Irish brothers includes an inscription below Edgar's name, reading: "He made, preserved and supplied the evidence that made possible the execution of Capt. Wirz, the keeper of Andersonville Prison."

While conditions at Andersonville were indeed horrific — some 13,000 Union soldiers perished there — Wirz was not entirely to blame. In 1864 the Union had ceased exchanging war prisoners with the Confederates, which meant captive soldiers from both sides languished in poor conditions until the end of the war. As the Confederacy began to fail, provisions were particularly difficult to obtain by the Andersonville commandant.

Historians also suggest that some eyewitness evidence against Wirz was, at the least, embellished.

Nevertheless, Edgar Irish is remembered in history as providing credible facts and figures that told much of the agony of Andersonville.

Martha A. Irish Burdick of Portville, sister to George and Edgar, read her poem, "A Tribute of Honor," at the dedication of a monument erected by the state of New York in the Nation Cemetery at Andersonville on April 29, 1914. These lines were from the poem:

These men were prisoners of war—
Our sires, our brothers and our sons—
Made captives in the battle's front
'Mid clash of arms and booming guns.
Within the prison pen they bore
Till death the agonies and woes
Whose harvest the grim reaper gleaned,
Whose aftermath no mortal knows.

No sword or gun or bayonet
Lies by the side of those who sank
Unarmed and unresisting here,
Unknown to fame or fortune's rank.
They died and yet they might have lived—

Might have escaped their awful lot—
If they had bartered loyalty
For their release, but they would not.

Did you know? Dan Sickles' ties to Southern Maryland

Baynet.con August 21, 2016

There are probably few figures in American History as enigmatic, flamboyant or more controversial that Daniel Edgar Sickles, born 1819 in Brooklyn, New York.

On a lonely stretch of backroad in western Charles County, there stands a historical marker designating that Sickles, commander of the "Excelsior Brigade" from New York, maintained headquarters in Southern Maryland from October 1861 until March 1862. Few realize this powerful personality ever held a presence here.

Before the War Between the States erupted, Sickles was already both famous and infamous. He obtained his law degree from New York University, became interested in politics and in fact held several offices, including corporate consul of New York City; Secretary of U.S. Legation in London; and a state and federal legislator representing New York State.

The year before the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter, however, the Congressman became embroiled in a notorious scandal when he shot Philip Barton Key to death on the streets of Washington, DC.

Key was the son of Francis Scott Key, composer of The Star-Spangled Banner, who also had ties to Southern Maryland.

Philip Key had been having an affair with Sickles' wife, Theresa.

By this time, Sickles had won back his seat in Congress and was spending a good deal of time away from his young wife.

Lafayette Square in Washington was the social hub of the day and they often attended lavish parties.

Key had an apartment a mere block away from the Sickles home and established a handkerchief-waving signal with his paramour eventually witnessed by gossip-eager socialites. Someone slipped the Congressman a note revealing his wife's infidelities and he confronted her.

Harper's Bazaar quoted Theresa as admitting, "Oh, I see I am discovered."

She begged her husband to spare her, and he did, but not before having her sign a full confession in front of two witnesses.

The following morning, he saw Key wave his handkerchief toward his wife's window.

Sickles is reported to have said to a friend, "I have seen the scoundrel making his signals. My God, this is terrible."

Later that evening, he saw Key leave the Washington Club, walking toward 16th Street. Sickles headed him off, produced a pistol and gushed, "Key, you scoundrel, you have dishonored my house. You must die!" And fired.

When Key rushed forward in an attempt to keep Sickles from reloading, the Congressman whipped out another pistol. Key fell backward against a lamp post, begging for his life. Sickles shot twice more. Washington residents often reported encountering Key's restless spirit for years after the murder on the streets of Lafayette Square.



THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

The sensational trial made headlines throughout the country and is notable for two reasons.

The cuckolded husband was represented by Edwin M. Stanton, who would later become Lincoln's Secretary of War during the Civil War. Despite the fact that Sickles fired three shots into an unarmed man, he was acquitted of murder by temporary loss of reason, the first time in American History the temporary insanity plea was successfully used in a court of law.

When the War Between the States began, Sickles was authorized to raise a regiment and recruited enough men to form a brigade which earned him a brigadier's star.

From from October 1861 until March 1862, the troops were headquartered and trained in Charles County before they mustered to war.

It was the Battle of Gettysburg where his name was emblazoned into American History, when he defied orders, advancing his men from Cemetery Ridge—where he was assigned—to the Peach Orchard.

Historians have speculated Sickles probably faced court martial had he not lost his leg to a cannonball in the fighting.

There are claims that because he moved his men forward, this helped repel Confederate General Longstreet's assault before it could reach the ridge. Others dispute that claim.

Sickles was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor 30 years after the war.

A crusty old bunker, he donated his severed limb to the old Army Medical Hospital that stood where the Hirshhorn Museum stands today.

He would often visit the leg with friends and custodians at the old hospital recall seeing a one-legged

spectre during evening shifts after the old war dog's death in 1914.

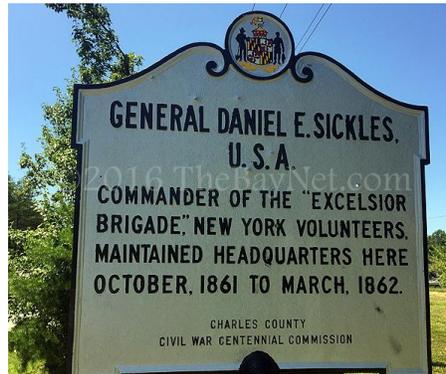


Photo Baynet.com

New book highlights Civil War online collection

By Katherine Calos Richmond Times-Dispatch, August 19, 2016

A digital legacy of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War has become a book in the new "Civil War Echoes: Voices from Virginia, 1860-1891," edited by historian James Robertson.

It will be released Sept. 14 at the Library of Virginia with author talks and book signings.

The Library of Virginia visited every county in the state between 2010 and 2015 to digitize family documents in a Virginia sesquicentennial legacy project.

More than 32,000 family letters, reminiscences, diaries, journals, maps, photographs, drawings and other documents created during the war or reflecting on the wartime experience were scanned for the project.

Retired Virginia Tech professor Robertson selected excerpts from the digitized collection, spanning the experience of Civil War soldiers from battle to camp to religion to desertion.

Included in the collection is a letter

owned by Elizabeth Staples of Richmond that was written to her great-great-grandfather, Union soldier Capt. John Chinn, and the small chest in which he kept his correspondence during the war.

The document was digitized as part of a Library of Virginia collection.

Another digitized letter, dated Jan. 3, 1864, was written by Confederate soldier George McSwain. Convicted of desertion, he told his wife and children that "I expect to part this life on next Saturday by the sentence of a General courtmartial, to be tied down to a stake on that day, the 9th of this month, and be shot to death with musketry.

"But little thought I had of this when I volunteered in the service of my country, to protect my home and family, that my life would be taken by my own people simply for absenting myself from my post with the view of protecting my little helpless children and affectionate wife, who is as near and dear to me as my own life. Hanna, I was in very good heart all the time and didnt think they would shoot me until yesterday morning my sentence came," McSwain wrote.

Robertson will speak Sept. 14 about the selections he chose to include and why the Legacy Project collection is important.

In recognition of his work, the collection was renamed the James I. Robertson Jr. Civil War Sesquicentennial Legacy Collection.

The complete collection may be accessed online at <http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/cw150>.