

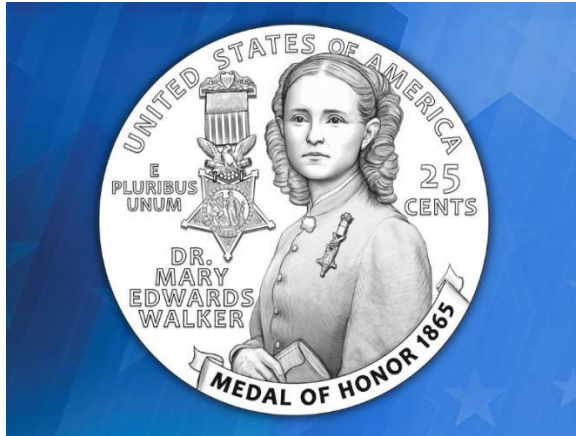


THE OLD LINER



Dr. Mary Edwards Walker Recognized on New U.S. Quarter

Smithsonian June 4, 2024



Civil War era surgeon, women's rights and dress reform advocate

American Women Quarters Program

Early Life

Born outside of Oswego, New York, Mary Edwards Walker was one of seven children to Alvah and Vesta Walker. A progressive couple, the Walkers raised their children with gender and racial equality in mind: the family split domestic work equally among everyone, the Walker parents opened the first free school in Oswego with all five of their daughters attending, the family farm sheltered freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad, and all the girls were encouraged to pursue higher education and professional careers.

In 1855, Walker graduated from Syracuse Medical College, making her only the second female doctor in American history (the first, Elizabeth Blackwell, graduated from Geneva Medical College in Geneva, New York, only six years prior). Shortly

after completing her studies, Walker and a fellow medical student, Albert Miller, married and started a private practice in Rome, New York. Continuing her habit of living her progressive values and viewpoints, Walker refused to agree to “obey” Miller in their wedding vows, kept her maiden name, and wore a short skirt with trousers—which she called Reform Dress—during the wedding ceremony. By 1859, both the couple's medical practice and marriage had failed; after a ten-year separation, Walker filed for divorce on the grounds of Miller's infidelity. It was an act that stigmatized her for the remainder of her life as anti-marriage or anti-family, two unfathomable concepts for women in American society at the time.

Civil War Era

At the start of the American Civil War, Walker felt compelled to aid the Union cause. Initially, she traveled to Washington, D.C. with the intention of joining the Army as a surgeon, thinking their need for trained medical professionals would outweigh their reluctance to accept a female doctor. She was mistaken, and her request for an official commission was denied. Undeterred, Walker began volunteering as an assistant surgeon at a makeshift hospital in the U.S. Patent Office (now home to the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery and Smithsonian American Art Museum).

To allow for as much movement and comfort as possible while working on the injured, she abandoned the traditional long skirts and corsets, preferring instead to wear a skirt/trouser combo which she paired with a feminine hairstyle so people would be able to identify her as female. During this time, Walker helped establish the Women's Relief



THE OLD LINER



Organization which sought to aid the female family members that came to visit wounded loved ones in the military hospital. Throughout her time in D.C., Walker faced open hostility and abuse for her nonconformance to gender norms, but her medical expertise and the respect she earned for the treatment she gave to soldiers and civilians alike, eventually overcame.



1872 photograph of Dr. Mary Edwards Walker wearing the dress and trouser combination from her time as a surgeon for the Union Army. Image courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

By the end of 1862, Walker was taken in as a Union field surgeon—though still as a non-commissioned volunteer—where she worked near the frontlines during the battles

in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and Chattanooga, Tennessee. During this time, Walker never stopped petitioning for a commission as an Army surgeon, going so far as to appeal directly to both Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, and President Abraham Lincoln. In response, she was promoted to “Contract Acting Assistant Surgeon (civilian)” for the 52nd Ohio Regiment, the closest she would ever come to a formal enlistment.¹

On April 10, 1864, Walker’s life forever changed. While in Confederate-controlled territory, she was captured and sent to military prison at Castle Thunder in Richmond, Virginia. Like many prisons during the war, Castle Thunder became increasingly overcrowded with an estimated 700 to 1000 prisoners held at the time of Walker’s arrival. Additionally, the reputation of Castle Thunder guards was one of such extreme cruelty that the Confederate House of Representatives conducted an investigation for “excessive brutality and accidental shootings of prisoners.”² Although Walker was only at Castle Thunder for a few months, during that time she experienced severe weight loss, suffered from bronchitis, and experienced a permanent loss in eyesight that is partially responsible for her leaving the medical field shortly after the end of the Civil War.³ Walker was released in exchange for a Confederate surgeon in August 1864. Throughout the remainder of her life, she openly referred to this prisoner exchange as validation from the Army⁴ and said that she was delighted in being part of a “man for man” swap.⁵

Congressional Medal of Honor

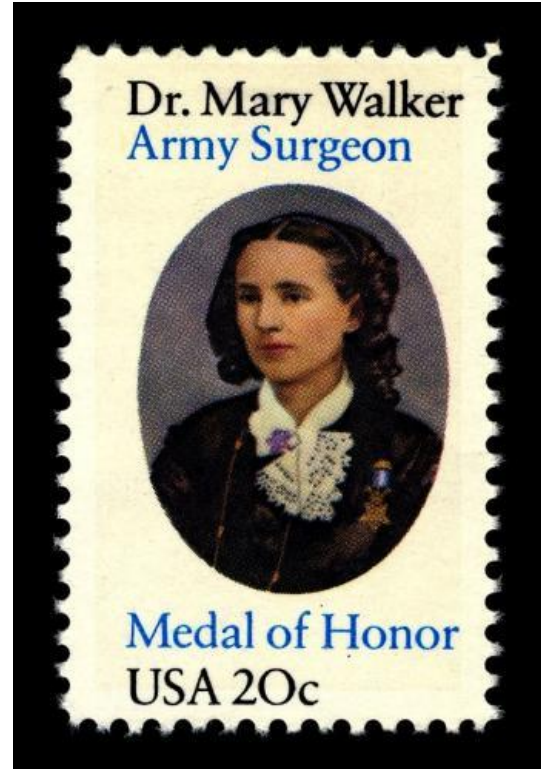


THE OLD LINER



No stranger to situations that required her to bravely face gender discrimination head-on, Walker fought for a military pension after the Civil War. Yet again, the Army's unwillingness to allow her a formal enlistment waylaid her plans. Instead, President Andrew Johnson awarded her a Congressional Medal of Honor in 1865, making her the first woman to receive the prestigious award. Nearly 160 years later, she remains the sole female recipient.

The official award reads, in part, that Dr. Mary E. Walker "has rendered valuable service to the Government, and her efforts have been earnest and untiring in a variety of ways."⁶ These words notably omit any mention to active combat service, which, according to the revised standards for the award (issued in 1916), disqualified Walker and 910 other recipients from their medals. Walker refused to return her medal, proudly wearing it on her chest every day for the remaining two years of her life. Sixty years later, after years of work by her descendants, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker's Congressional Medal of Honor was restored in 1977.



U.S. postage stamp from 1982, depicting Dr. Mary Edwards Walker with her Medal of Honor. Image courtesy of the National Postal Museum. Copyright United States Postal Service. All rights reserved.

Social Activism

Rather unsurprisingly, Walker was an outspoken advocate for women's rights and equality. Following the end to her medical career, she dedicated her time to advancing her social activism and became entrenched in the suffragist movement, worked to secure military pensions for wartime nurses, and became a proponent of dress reform. Over time, the work Walker did for voting rights brought her into the social networks of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, where they fought alongside one another despite divergent opinions. Unlike the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), which advocated for a



THE OLD LINER



Constitutional Amendment guaranteeing a woman's right to vote, Walker proposed that no amendment was needed as the Constitution already granted them the right—it just needed to be enforced. To prove her point, Walker attempted to vote in the 1871 election but was denied. Unfortunately, despite their shared goal, the different paths that Walker and NWSA wanted to take to get there eventually resulted in them parting ways.

Walker's preference for clothes that were socially acceptable for men to wear didn't stop at trousers; as she got older, she began incorporating suit jackets and top hats into her wardrobe. Never one to shy away from controversy, these clothing choices put a spotlight on her that she refused to hide from. In 1870, she was arrested in New Orleans for impersonating a man, and in both 1912 and 1914 she testified to the U.S. House of Representatives about women's suffrage while wearing a pantsuit. She even opted to be buried in a black jacket and matching trousers. Walker is quoted as saying, "I don't wear men's clothes. I wear my clothes."⁷

Learn More

The National Postal Museum has created an online collection of Smithsonian objects related to Dr. Mary Edwards Walker.

Notes:

1. Alexandra R. Pass and Jennifer D. Bishop, "Mary Edwards Walker: Trailblazing feminist, surgeon, and war veteran," American College of Surgeons, 2016.
2. "Dr. Mary Edwards Walker," Richmond National Battlefield Park,

National Parks Service, last modified March 30, 2022.

3. "Dr. Mary E. Walker: The sole female Medal of Honor Recipient," Wounded Warrior Project.
4. "Dr. Mary Edwards Walker," Richmond National Battlefield Park.
5. Pass, "Mary Edwards Walker."
6. "Mary Edwards Walker," Congressional Medal of Honor Society.
7. Pass, "Mary Edwards Walker."

Further Reading:

- "Dr. Mary Edwards Walker," Richmond National Battlefield Park, National Parks Service, March 30, 2022.
- "Dr. Mary Edwards Walker," Chickamauga & Chattanooga National Military Park, Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park, National Park Service, April 12, 2021.
- "Women in Medicine and Science at Upstate: Mary Edwards Walker, MD," Upstate Medical University Health Sciences Library, Jan. 19, 2024.
- *Katie Lange, "Meet Dr. Mary Walker: The only female Medal of Honor Recipient," U.S. Army, 2017.*

0-0

Commemorate the 165th anniversary of John Brown's Raid



THE OLD LINER



at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park

US Marine Corps Historical Company to offer special programs, Park Rangers to lead tours throughout the park and key areas in Charles Town

NPS October 12, 2024

The National Park Service is hosting special events commemorating abolitionist John Brown's attempt to seize weapons from the U.S. Armory at Harpers Ferry in an effort to spark an anti-slavery uprising.

On Oct. 16, 1859, John Brown and 21 like-minded individuals—both African American and White—launched an attack on the U.S. Armory in Harpers Ferry, then part of Virginia, the largest slaveholding state in the Union. Brown aimed to arm an anti-slavery force to incite liberation movements.

Though the raid was ended by U.S. Marines, it ignited tensions across the nation, influencing the 1860 presidential election and serving as a catalyst to the start of the Civil War.

Special Programs:

Oct. 19-20

Park rangers and the U.S. Marine Corps Historical Company will present “At All Times Ready,” an immersive experience showcasing the raid and its impact on American civil rights history. Programs start at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m., beginning on the Green in Lower Town and ending at the historic U.S. Armory fire engine house, known as John Brown's Fort. Reenactors will be available to answer questions from visitors at John Brown's Fort from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Oct. 18, 25, and Dec. 2

A park ranger will lead “Clearing the Sky,” a two-part program exploring John Brown's raid and the trial that divided a nation. The program begins at 11 a.m. in Lower Town and continues at 1:30 p.m. at the Jefferson County Courthouse in Charles Town, where Brown was tried. The tour concludes at the site of Brown's execution and the Jefferson County Museum, featuring artifacts such as the wagon that transported Brown to his hanging. The program covers approximately one mile on mostly flat ground, so comfortable walking shoes are recommended.

John Brown's complex legacy remains a powerful symbol in America's ongoing dialogue on race, justice, and the fight against oppression.

The park extends its gratitude to the Harpers Ferry Park Association, Jefferson County Museum, and Jefferson County Commission for their support in bringing “At All Times Ready” and “Clearing the Sky” to life.

Walk in the footsteps of history and explore the stories that shaped our nation. For more on Harpers Ferry NHP events, visit Calendar - Harpers Ferry National Historical Park (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov).

0-0

Special Photography Program at Appomattox Court House NHP



THE OLD LINER



By Brian Miller, NPS, October 10, 2024

Appomattox, Va— Join Artist-in-Residence Jeb Inge at Appomattox Court House National Historical Park for a special program exploring the role of photography during the Civil War. This program will be offered at 11:50 AM on Saturday, October 19, Sunday, October 20, and Sunday, October 27. Based in Berlin, Germany, but a native off Virginia, Inge is a professional photographer working in different mediums focused on visual storytelling.

This one-hour program will examine Civil War era photography and introduce visual storytelling and large format photography. The program includes a guided 0.25 mile walk on mostly level surfaces. All programs are free and open to the public.

—NPS—

About Appomattox Court House National Historical Park: On April 9, 1865, the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia in the McLean House in the village of Appomattox Court House, Virginia signaled the end of the nation's largest war. The stories of Appomattox Court House go far beyond the final significant battles of this nation's Civil War. Learn more at www.nps.gov/apco.

About the National Park Service: More than 20,000 National Park Service employees care for America's more than 420 national park units and work with communities across the nation to help preserve local history and create close-to-home recreational opportunities. Visit us at www.nps.gov, on Facebook www.facebook.com/nationalparkservice, Twitter www.twitter.com/natlparkservice, and YouTube www.youtube.com/nationalparkservice.

0-0

Stones River National Battlefield Seeks Public Comments on Trail Plan



The Boundary Trail Photo by Karen Havill Bingham

Josh Clemons and Jim Lewis, NPS, October 10, 2024



THE OLD LINER



Murfreesboro, Tennessee – Stones River National battlefield is seeking public comment on its plan to enhance the accessibility, extent, and connectivity of park trails. The Trail Plan will guide management and development of the park's trail system for the next 10-20 years.

The public is invited to view the preliminary plans and share their insights from 6-8 PM on Friday October 25, 2024 at the park visitor center (3501 Old Nashville Highway, Murfreesboro, TN 37129) and from 10 AM to 12 PM on Saturday October 26, 2024 at the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County (225 West College Street, Murfreesboro, TN 37130). The planning team will share a brief synopsis of the planning process to date when each session starts.

Those wishing to view and comment on plans virtually, should contact the park at stri_administration@nps.gov. We will email you a copy of the plans along with instructions for submitting your comments.

Those attending the October 25th session should use the visitor center parking lot gate on Old Nashville Highway to enter the park. The tour road and Thompson Lane gates will be closed at 5 PM.

0-0

Richmond National Battlefield Park Will Commemorate Election Day 1864: Black Soldiers Vote on the Front Lines



Stephanie Pooler, Scott Teodorski, NPS,
October 9, 2024

RICHMOND, Va.— On Saturday, November 2, Richmond National Battlefield Park will commemorate the anniversary of the 5th United States Colored Troops (USCT) voting in the 1864 presidential election at Fort Harrison. “Election Day 1864: Black Soldiers Vote on the Front Lines” will include park ranger-led programs, living history and educational activities from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Fort Harrison visitor center (8761 Battlefield Park Road, Richmond VA).

1864 was a year of decision, on battlefields and at ballot boxes. On September 29, 1864, United States soldiers captured New Market Heights and Fort Harrison from Confederate defenders. Fourteen African American soldiers were later awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions in the assaults, and U. S. soldiers now had a toehold in the Richmond defenses. The upcoming election would determine the future of both the Civil War and Emancipation.



THE OLD LINER



According to state law, some of Ohio's Black soldiers of the 5th USCT, stationed near Fort Harrison, were eligible to vote in Ohio's elections. Like other Northern states, Ohio had passed a law specifically allowing absentee soldier voting. Thirty-nine days after capturing the Confederate fort, on November 8, 1864, they cast 194 votes for Abraham Lincoln's reelection. These USCTs took one of the early steps toward encouraging voting rights and citizenship for all African Americans.

This commemorative event will highlight recent scholarship and research on the first documented Black voting in the U.S. Army.

The schedule for the commemoration on Saturday, November 2 is as follows:

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Historical election day hands-on activities for all ages.

Park partners and community organizations being represented. Self-guided interactive exhibits. Fort Harrison Visitor Center will be open for the event.

Picnicking is encouraged!

10:00 a.m. "Black Soldiers Guarding the Front Lines: A tour of Fort Harrison/ Fort Burnham and its role in the battles for Richmond"

11:00 a.m. "194: The 5th USCT's vote at Fort Harrison" walking program

12:00 p.m. "Corresponding with History" Living history presentation depicting Thomas Morris Chester, the only African American reporter for a Civil War daily newspaper, and his firsthand account of election day 1864.

1:00 p.m. "Black Soldiers Guarding the Front Lines: A tour of Fort Harrison/ Fort Burnham and its role in the battles for Richmond"

2:00 p.m. "194: The 5th USCT's vote at Fort Harrison" walking program

3:00 p.m. "Corresponding with History" Interactive living history presentation, a conversation with Thomas Morris Chester, the only African American reporter for a Civil War daily newspaper, and his firsthand reporting of election day 1864.

Please check www.nps.gov/rich and www.Facebook.com/RichmondNPS for updates and information about park programming and operations.

About Richmond National Battlefield Park

Richmond National Battlefield Park consists of about 3700 acres of some of the most contested real estate of the American Civil War, in Hanover, Henrico and Chesterfield counties. Experiencing the park's battlefield sites and visitor centers usually takes a full day. A driving tour of the battlefields is available at any of the park's sites.

0-0

Leading Conservation Organizations File Amicus Brief In Opposition to World's Largest Data Center Development

Groups say Prince William Digital Gateway will cause irreparable harm to Manassas Battlefield and other historic, natural and cultural resources

Elena Schlossberg, Coalition to Protect PW County, elenalouise@hotmail.com, ABT



THE OLD LINER



October 4, 2024

(Manassas, Virginia) — On October 3, 2024, six leading conservation organizations committed to the preservation of the nation’s battlefields and natural resources have filed an amicus curiae brief in support of a lawsuit to stop construction of the world’s largest data center campus immediately adjacent to the Manassas National Battlefield Park. According to the brief, the project “would inevitably lead to the irreversible and irreparable desecration of hallowed ground and the despoiling of the natural and cultural resources in Prince William County and across the Commonwealth.”

The friend-of-the-court brief was filed Thursday afternoon in the Circuit Court of Prince William County by the Coalition to Protect Prince William County, Piedmont Environmental Council, National Parks Conservation Association, Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, National Trust for the Historic Preservation in the United States and Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks. The filing supports the nine residents and the American Battlefield Trust who have sued to overturn the December 2023 rezoning, which was rushed through to approval by a lame-duck Board of Supervisors despite the negative recommendation of county staff and the County’s Planning Commission and overwhelming public opposition. A hearing in the suit to determine if the case will be permitted to proceed toward trial is set for October 31.

The Prince William Digital Gateway — with 37 proposed data center buildings roughly the equivalent of 144 Walmart Supercenters — would sprawl across 1,750 acres immediately adjacent to the Manassas Battlefield and would require 14 on-site electrical substations for operation. The National Park Service has called it the most significant threat to the battlefield park in three decades.

“The Digital Gateway promises to transform this idyllic portion of Prince William County into a buzzing hive of industrial activity, sucking up vast quantities of water and electricity and stretching transmission lines across the County and beyond,” the organizations wrote to the court.

The organizations, with a combined membership of more than one million, said they are lending their voices to draw attention to the significance of the Manassas Battlefield and the decades of public and private action to protect it, as well as to provide historical context as the court considers the challenge to the rezoning.

Manassas National Battlefield Park commemorates two critical battles of the American Civil War, the Battles of First and Second Manassas (Bull Run). Although the initial engagement is remembered as the first major land battle of the war, the second was more significant to its outcome and witnessed one of the most devastating and decisive assaults of the conflict. Together, the two battles produced nearly 27,000 casualties. While the presence of a national park demonstrates the significance of these battles, it is critical to recognize that important historical events occurred beyond its modern boundaries, some of which are



THE OLD LINER



slated to be the site of the Digital Gateway. The Congressionally created Civil War Sites Advisory Commission, in considering the state of all Civil War battlefields, designated the battlefields of First and Second Manassas among the most important for preservation and historic significance.

Large-scale efforts to protect Civil War sites emerged at the turn of the 20th century, with the national park at Manassas formalized in 1936. A modern battlefield preservation movement began in the 1980s in response to the rapid suburban development in Northern Virginia. After NPS acquired 600 acres near the park, including the site of Robert E. Lee's Second Manassas headquarters, in a last-minute deal to prevent it from becoming a shopping mall, more proactive methods for preservation were sought. In 1990, Congress responded by creating the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission to identify the nation's historically significant sites, assess their condition and "recommend alternatives for preserving and interpreting them."

Threats of development to the Manassas Battlefield have persisted and increased. Since 2009, the American Battlefield Trust has taken action to acquire multiple parcels of historic significance in the area that will be impacted by the Prince William Digital Gateway. This includes 170 acres once part of Rock Hill Farm, an area that served as a field hospital during Second Manassas and likely saw the burial of many who did not survive the battle. Although significant effort was made to reinter the remains of the vast majority of those buried on the battlefield in more formal cemeteries, remains are regularly found on battlefields, including Manassas. The proposed Digital

Gateway not only threatens these hallowed grounds, but the remains of those who fell and were laid to rest on the field.

In their filing, the nonprofit organizations said the Prince William County Board of Supervisors were "duty bound to give due account to the historical, environmental, and other impacts of their decision," but did not conduct the proper process or give due account for the will of the people they represent. The brief also noted the varying interests of the organizations in the filing, which demonstrate the diverse impact of the rezoning and the importance of the court's decision.

"Data centers are a fundamental part of the technology infrastructure that supports the modern economy, and they have a place in Prince William County and other localities in Virginia. However, given the enormous impacts they can have on the surrounding environment and nearby communities, it is essential that they be appropriately sited and scaled," the organizations said.

On December 13, 2023, Prince William County's Board of Supervisors approved plans for the massive Digital Gateway complex, a data center campus in the narrow corridor between the western border of Manassas National Battlefield Park and Conway Robinson State Forest. After a 27-hour meeting that included public comment from hundreds of area residents, the final vote in favor was 4-3, with one abstention. In response, the American Battlefield Trust, which owns preserved battlefield properties adjacent to the rezoning, and nine residents filed suit to overturn the measure. The nonprofit organizations that submitted the amicus brief were active in opposing the



THE OLD LINER



rezoning. On October 31, 2024, a hearing will be held on motions filed by the County and the developers of the Digital Gateway to dismiss the suit. A decision is expected soon afterward.

Coalition to Protect Prince William County, <https://protectpwc.org/>, Elena Schlossberg, elenalouise@hotmail.com 703-587-0765

Piedmont Environmental Council, <https://www.pecva.org/>, Cindy Sabato, 540-347-2334 x7021, csabato@pecva.org

Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (Preservation Virginia), <https://preservationvirginia.org/>, Jenna Affeldt, 804-404-6924, jaffeldt@preservationvirginia.org

Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, <https://protectnps.org/>, Emily Thompson, 202-819-8622, Emily_Thompson@protectnps.org

National Parks Conservation Association, www.npca.org, Kyle Groetzing, 202-893-3391, kgroetzing@npca.org

National Trust for Historic Preservation, <https://savingplaces.org/>, Elliot Carter, 301-873-8520, ECarter@savingplaces.org

0-0

Call for Nominations! American Battlefield Trust Prize for History Will Award \$50,000 for Outstanding Military History Book

In accepting the inaugural honor for her Longstreet biography, historian Elizabeth Varon described battlefields as “wellsprings of new knowledge and expertise”

Mary Koik, Claire Barrett, ABT. October 1, 2024

(Washington, D.C.) — The nomination window for the 2025 American Battlefield Trust Prize for History is now open, with publishers invited to submit outstanding works of relevant military history and biography from calendar year 2024 through December 31.

In accepting the inaugural \$50,000 award late last month, winner Dr. Elizabeth Varon, PhD., noted: “When we invest in battlefield preservation we are investing not only in saving landscapes but also in promoting education, and preserving certain habits of mind — the careful, patient, rigorous study of evidence, both material and literary; the appreciation of expertise, both professional and amateur; and the realization that no matter how useful and constructive our various new technologies can be, there is no substitute for seeing and experiencing a landscape with your own eyes.”

Varon, an acclaimed professor at the University of Virginia, won the prize for her biography *Longstreet: The Confederate General Who Defied the South*, while D. Scott Hartwig and Friederike Baer received honorable mention for *I Dread the Thought of the Place: The Battle of Antietam and the End of the Maryland Campaign* and *Hessians: German Soldiers in the American Revolutionary War*, respectively.

The Trust launched the Book Prize for History in 2023 to amplify the integral connection between the grounds on which the nation’s formative conflicts were decided and the fundamental role these



THE OLD LINER



landscapes play for the scholars and historians who help new generations more deeply understand the past, making them, in Varon's words, "wellsprings of new knowledge and expertise."



The Inaugural American Battlefield Trust Book Prize for History Award is presented at the Trust's Grand Review in Raleigh, North Carolina. Mike Talplacido

According to Trust president David Duncan, "The significance of the battlefields on which the fate of our nation was decided is coming into even greater focus as the nation nears the 250th anniversary of our founding. And as the threat of their destruction through mega development and unregulated data centers persists, the time to act is now – lest they have disappeared by the tricentennial."

The Prize is awarded to a work of military history or biography that underscores the essential role of the nation's military conflicts on the founding, formation and endurance of our nation. The award is sponsored by a generous donor and seeks to encourage authors to create works that showcase the value of historic battlefields and to galvanize readers around the urgent need for preservation to protect these lands.

Nominations for the 2025 Book Prize for History will be accepted until December 31, 2024. The qualifying works must have been published in the preceding calendar year and focus on history or biography related to the three conflicts that are central to the Trust's mission: the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and the Civil War. Nominations are first narrowed by an initial selection committee, chaired in the inaugural year by noted Civil War historian Dr. Gary Gallagher, who helped found the Trust nearly 40 years ago. Previous judges were: James Kirby Martin (Cullen Professor Emeritus, University of Houston), James McPherson (Pulitzer Prize winner, George Henry Davis '86 Professor Emeritus of United States History at Princeton University) and Joan Waugh (Professor Emeritus, UCLA).

The winner and two runner-up finalists will be announced this spring. Publishers inquiring about submission guidelines and official rules may email bookprize@battlefields.org.

About the American Battlefield Trust

From a grassroots organization started by historians nearly 40 years ago, the American Battlefield Trust has grown into one of the most successful nonprofit, heritage land preservation organizations in the nation. The 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 57,000 acres associated with the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War, representing more than 155 sites in 25 states from Massachusetts to New Mexico. Its 350,000 members and supporters believe in the



THE OLD LINER



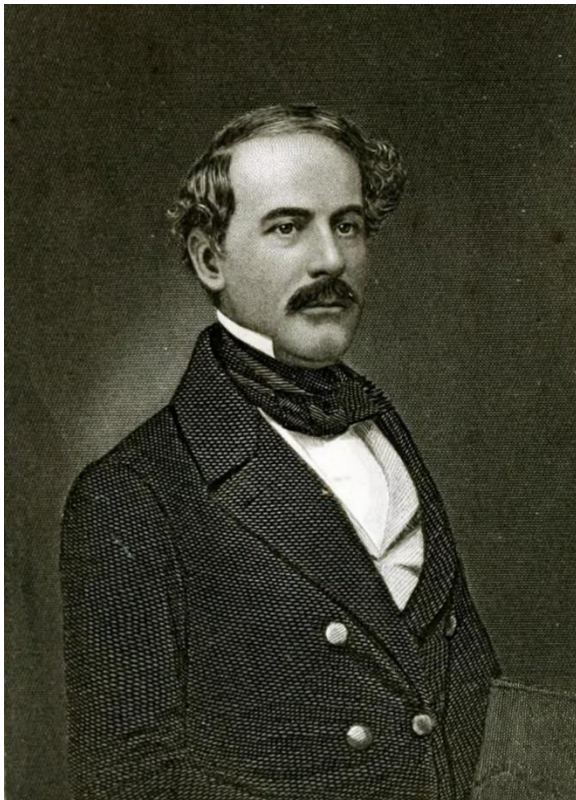
power of place and the continued relevance of our shared history to modern American society. Learn more at www.battlefields.org.

(Publishers inquiring about submission guidelines and official rules may email bookprize@battlefields.org.)

0-0

Robert E. Lee: "I Declined the Offer"

William Connery, September 30, 2024,
blueandgrayeducation.org



Robert E. Lee as he would have appeared when making his decision to resign at Arlington in 1861 | NPS

In March 1861, Robert E. Lee met with Gen. Winfield Scott at the United States War Department. For three hours, the old general and his favorite subordinate spoke together.

What was said during that conversation was never revealed. But Scott's known opinion to secession—despite being from Virginia—his admiration for Lee, and his desire to assure strong leadership for the army allow us to reasonably reconstruct part of the dialogue. Scott likely told Lee that he would soon be promoted to colonel and hinted that, should Scott himself be too feeble to take the field, he would recommend Lee as his second-in-command. If Lee responded to Scott's overtures, it was probably with the sentiment that if Virginia seceded, he would follow her, as he considered his primary obligation to be to his state. When Lee left, it was reported that Scott's manner was "painfully silent."

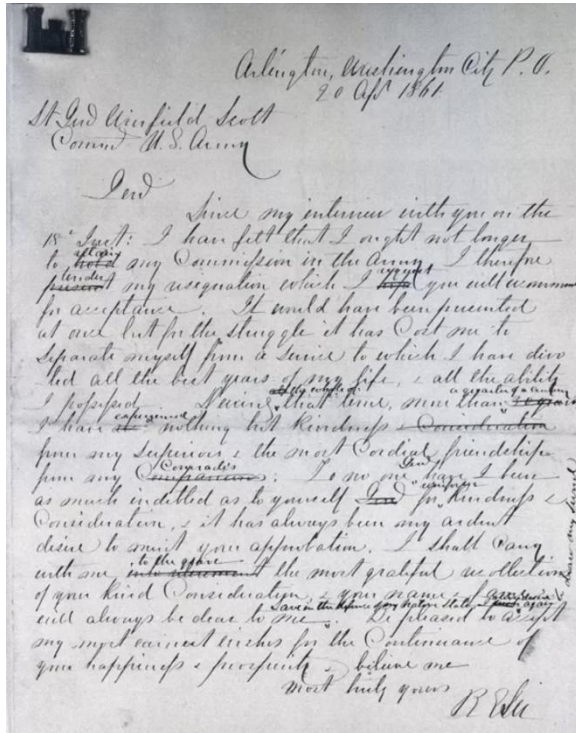
About the same time Lee got a letter written dated March 15 from LeRoy Pope Walker, the Confederate States of America's Secretary of War. This letter was a direct offer of a commission as brigadier general—the highest rank then authorized—in the army the South was forming. The letter read: "You are requested to signify your acceptance or non-acceptance of said appointment, and should you accept, you will sign before a magistrate the oath of office herewith and forward the same, with your letter of acceptance to this office." After many years of slow promotion, honors were now coming quickly: a colonelcy in one army and a generalship in the rival service. There is no record of Lee's reply to this offer from the Confederacy, but it is likely he ignored it. What is certain is that he was not enticed by the promise of high position. Lee felt allegiance to only two governments: that of Virginia and that of the Union. As long as these two entities did not conflict, and as long as Virginia did not join



THE OLD LINER



the Confederacy, there was no thought of a third.



Lee's resignation letter to Winfield Scott | NPS

By March 28, Lee had been promoted to full colonel in the U.S. Army and had taken the oath of allegiance to the U.S. Constitution. On the morning of April 18, with no news yet from the Virginia Secession Convention in Richmond, Lee rode over the bridge to visit Francis Preston Blair, whose home stood across the street from the Presidential Mansion. Blair promptly explained his reason for the meeting. A large army, he said, would soon be called into the field, and President Lincoln had authorized him to ask Lee if he would accept the command.

This was a significant offer: command of an army of 75,000, perhaps even 100,000 men; the chance to apply all he had learned in Mexico; the realization of a soldier's highest ambition; the full support of the government;

the companionship of many of his most capable comrades; and the rank of major general. Yet Lee's response was clear: "If the Union is dissolved and the government disrupted, I shall return to my native state and share the miseries of my people and save in her defense, I will draw my sword on no one." There he made the fateful reply he later recounted of the interview: "I declined the offer he made me to take command of the army that was to be brought into the field, stating as candidly and as courteously as I could, that though opposed to secession and deprecating war, I could take no part in an invasion of the Southern States."

Bidding farewell to Blair, Lee went directly to General Scott's office. He sensed Scott's deep interest in his decision, and as soon as he had arrived, he told him what Blair had offered and his subsequent refusal. "Lee," said Scott, deeply moved, "you have made the greatest mistake of your life, but I feared it would be so."

That was all, as far as Lee was concerned. He had long before decided, instinctively, what his duty required, and the allure of supreme command, with all that a soldier craved, did not tempt him to equivocate for an instant or to see if there were not some way he could keep his own honor and still have the honor he understood the president had offered him.



THE OLD LINER



It was in this room at Arlington where Lee informed his family that he had resigned. | NPS

William Connery, aka The History Guy, is the author of Civil War Northern Virginia 1861 and Mosby's Raids in Civil War Northern Virginia.

0-0