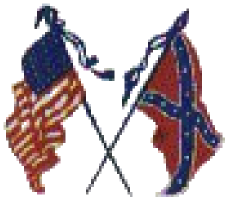
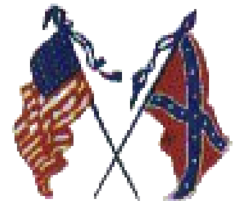




THE “OLD LINER” NEWSLETTER

FROM THE EDITOR

The BCWRT meeting scheduled for June 24 has been RESCHEDULED for June 25. The Hall is being used for the Maryland primary election on the 24th.

We are still verifying the speaker. Further information will be available at the May meeting and in a subsequent email.

Confederate submarine Hunley getting a chemical bath

By Bruce Smith, Associated Press, May 1, 2014

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. | Scientists near the city where the Civil War began prepared Thursday to soak an encrusted Confederate submarine in a chemical bath to reveal its hull for the first time in 150 years, seeking to solve the mystery of the demise of the first sub in history to sink an enemy warship

The hand-cranked H.L. Hunley — which rests in a 76,000-gallon conservation tank — will be treated with a solution of sodium hydroxide for about three months to loosen the encrustation coating the hull and interior of the sub.

Conservationists will drain the tank each day and later, wearing protective gear, use hand tools to remove the hard sand, sediment and rust coating the sub before refilling the tank each evening.

"This is the end of the beginning" of the preservation work, said Nestor Gonzalez-Pereyra, the associate director of the Lasch Conservation Center at Clemson University's Restoration Institute. "In a year we may be able to have the clues."

Removing the encrustation will reveal the original surface of the hull and with it any damage that could yield new clues to its sinking off Charleston, S.C., in February 1864. The war had begun with the bombardment of Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor three years earlier. The sub and its crew of eight had set off a powder charge that sank the Union blockade ship USS Housatonic as the Confederacy tried to break a Union blockade of Charleston. But the Hunley never returned and just why remains a mystery.

The wreck was discovered off the coast in 1995. Five years later, in August of 2000, cannons boomed, church bells rang and thousands watched from the harbor side as the 40-foot-long sub was raised and brought by barge to the conservation lab. The silt-filled interior of the sub was later excavated and the remains of the crewmen removed.

The Confederate submarine H.L. Hunley sits in a conservation tank at a lab in North Charleston, S.C., before it was to be covered in a chemical bath on Thursday, May 1, 2014. (AP Photo/Bruce Smith)

In April of 2004, thousands of men in Confederate gray and Union blue walked in a procession with the crew's coffins from Charleston's waterfront Battery to Magnolia Cemetery in what has been called the last Confederate funeral.

Last year, scientists announced it appears the charge that sank the Houstonic was attached to the 16-foot spar at the front of the sub. That could mean the crew was knocked unconscious by the explosion and died before awakening. A closer look at the hull may provide clues.

"Chiseling away the concretion will allow us to travel back in time, potentially helping us learn what happened to the Hunley and her crew that night," Lt. Gov. Glenn McConnell, the chairman of the South Carolina Hunley Commission, said in a statement.

When the Hunley was raised, historians thought it was farther away from the Housatonic and speculated the crew ran out of air before they could crank the submarine back to the coast.

Gonzalez-Pereyra said while the encrustation on the hull should be removed in a year, the sub will have to soak in the chemical bath for at least four more years to remove salts in the metal and prevent further corrosion of the sub.

Eventually the Hunley will be put on display in a new museum in North Charleston not far from the conservation lab.

Still Paying for the Civil War

Veteran’s benefits live on long after the fighting stops.

By Michael M. Philips, Wall Street Journal, May 14, 2014

WILKESBORO, N.C.—Each month, Irene Triplett collects $73.13 from the Department of Veterans Affairs, a pension payment for her father's military service—in the Civil War.

More than 3 million men fought and 530,000 men died in the conflict

between North and South. Pvt. Mose Triplett joined the rebels, deserted on the road to Gettysburg, defected to the Union and married so late in life to a woman so young that their daughter Irene is today 84 years old —and the last child of any Civil War veteran still on the VA benefits rolls.

Ms. Triplett's pension, small as it is, stands as a reminder that war's bills don't stop coming when the guns fall silent. The VA is still paying benefits to 16 widows and children of veterans from the 1898 Spanish-American War.

The last U.S. World War I veteran died in 2011. But 4,038 widows, sons and daughters get monthly VA pension or other payments. The government's annual tab for surviving family from those long-ago wars comes to $16.5 million.

Spouses, parents and children of deceased veterans from World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan received $6.7 billion in the 2013 fiscal year that ended Sept. 30. Payments are based on financial need, any disabilities, and whether the veteran's death was tied to military service.

A Harvard University study last year projected the final bill for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars would hit $4 trillion to $6 trillion in the coming decades.

Irene Triplett, 84, the last living recipient of VA benefits connected to the Civil War. Her father, Mose Triplett, fought for both South and North.

Ms. Triplett's father, Pvt. Mose Triplett, was born in 1846, on the mountainous Tennessee border in Watauga County, N.C. He was 16 years old when he got caught up in the fratricidal violence of the Civil War. North Carolina seceded from the Union soon after Confederate forces attacked federal troops at Fort Sumter, S.C., on April 12, 1861.

Confederate records show Pvt. Triplett joined the 53rd North Carolina Infantry Regiment in May 1862. He spent half of that enlistment hospitalized, though records aren't clear whether for illness or a gunshot wound to the shoulder that he suffered at some point during the war.

In January 1863, Pvt. Triplett transferred to the 26th North Carolina Infantry Regiment. The regiment's farmers, tradesmen and mountain men were commanded by 20-year-old Col. Henry Burgwyn, Jr., a strict drillmaster educated at the Virginia Military Institute, according to David McGee's regimental history. Earlier, in 1859, Col. Burgwyn had been one of the VMI cadets dispatched to provide security at the hanging of John Brown, the famous abolitionist.

Col. Burgwyn's martinet ways alienated his men at first. But he won their affection and a reputation for coolness under fire when he guided the regiment across a swollen river after the Southern defeat at New Bern, N.C.

In June 1863, the men were posted outside Fredericksburg, Va., trading artillery rounds with Union troops across the Rappahannock River. On June 15, the North Carolinians began the long march through the Shenandoah River Valley, across a slice of Maryland and into Gettysburg, Pa.

Along the way, Pvt. Triplett fell ill with fever and went to a Confederate hospital in an old tobacco warehouse in Danville, Va. Eight days later, he disappeared. Pvt. Triplett was "present or accounted for until he deserted on June 26, 1863," state records say.

He missed a terrible battle for his regiment, and the South, whose loss at Gettysburg portended its final defeat. Of the regiment's 800 men who fought at Gettysburg, 734 were killed, wounded or captured.

There was a strong strain of Union sympathy in western North Carolina. Friendly locals often helped hide Confederate deserters. Pvt. Triplett crossed the mountains to Knoxville, Tenn., where on Aug. 1, 1864, he joined a Union regiment, the 3rd North Carolina Mounted Infantry. Military records listed him as a farmer, 5 feet 8 inches, blue eyes and sandy hair. He signed his enlistment contract with an X.

An Army surgeon certified him "free from all bodily defects and mental infirmity, which would in any way disqualify him from performing the duties of a soldier." The recruiting officer swore that Pvt. Triplett was "entirely sober when enlisted." Pvt. Triplett's older brother, Darby, joined the same day.

Pvt. Triplett's Union regiment was nicknamed " Kirk's Raiders," after its daring, Tennessee-born commander, Col. George Washington Kirk. Col. Kirk, a carpenter, rocketed from private to commander of a regiment he assembled from Union supporters in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee.

Pvt. Triplett's new regiment slipped in and out of North Carolina to destroy Confederate supply depots, railroads, and bridges in the region where Pvt. Triplett grew up, according to a history by Matthew Bumgarner.

At times, Col. Kirk's men took food from Confederate sympathizers to give to Union sympathizers. Union commanders praised Col. Kirk for his derring-do. Confederates saw him and his men as little more than hooligans and turncoats.

The war came to a close after Gen. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court

House, Va., on April 9, 1865. Pvt. Triplett was discharged four months later. Military records show he owed the government $129.99 for uniforms and other gear, offset by a $100 enlistment bonus the Army owed him.

Back home, tensions simmered between those who had sided with the Confederacy and those who joined Union forces, especially a regiment as hated as Kirk's Raiders. "Most, if not all, of these soldiers would be outcasts, to a degree for the remainder of their lives," Ron V. Killian wrote in his history of the 3rd North Carolina Mounted Infantry.

In 1885, Pvt. Triplett applied for a pension and, apparently impatient with the delay, had his congressman submit legislation the following year to approve his request, a common practice. The bill died, but records suggest Pvt. Triplett eventually secured a Union pension of unknown size.

Pvt. Triplett had farmland and a big house near Elk Creek, in Wilkes County, N.C. Long after his death, local men would swap legends about what a "hard man" Mose Triplett had been, said his grandson, Charlie Triplett, who heard the stories from his father.

"A lot of people were afraid of him," Charlie Triplett said. "Most of the time he sat on the front porch with his old military pistol and shot walnuts off the trees just to let people know he had a gun."

Once, standing atop a car in the center of Wilkesboro, Pvt. Triplett cursed a local bank that had gone under and taken his money with it. "He was a cussing just like a preacher would preach," Charlie Triplett said.

Pvt. Triplett and his first wife, Mary, apparently had no surviving children, according to a review of decades of census records.

After Mary Triplett's death in the 1920s, Pvt. Triplett married Elida Hall, nearly 50 years his junior. She was a distant relation of Thomas Dula, whose 1868 hanging for his girlfriend's murder was recounted in the folk song "Tom Dooley," which was made popular by the Kingston Trio in a 1958 recording.

Such May-December marriages weren't uncommon. Jay Hoar, a Civil War researcher, found 72 couples where the age difference between the veteran and his wife was at least 19 years. The biggest spread was between a 93-year-old Virginia cavalryman and his 26-year-old bride. Many of the marriages took place during the Great Depression, when veterans' pensions offered some financial security. About a third of the wives were nurses, offering security for aged veterans, as well, according to Mr. Hoar.

Elida Hall's 1924 marriage doesn't appear to have been so blessed. She was mentally disabled, according to people who knew her. The couple lost three babies—Phema, Patsy, and Billie Coolidge. Irene was born in 1930 when her father was age 83 and her mother 34. Irene, too, suffered from mental disabilities, said past and current nursing home staff. Pvt. Triplett was just shy of his 87th birthday when Elida gave birth to a son, Everette, later the father of Charlie Triplett.

Irene said her teachers beat her with an oak paddle. Her parents continued the beatings at home, she said: "When you got a whooping in school you'd be getting tore up when you got back in those mountains."

Of her parents, she said, "I didn't care for neither one of them, to tell you the truth about it. I wanted to get away from both of them. I wanted to get me a house and crawl in it all by myself."

In 1938, on the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, the government paid for Civil War veterans from both sides to attend a reunion on the Pennsylvania battlefield. Pvt. Triplett was one of more than 1,800 who went.

"Lincoln spoke in solace for all who fought upon this field; and the years have laid their balm upon their wounds," President Franklin Roosevelt told them. "Men who wore the blue and men who wore the gray are here together, a fragment spared by time."

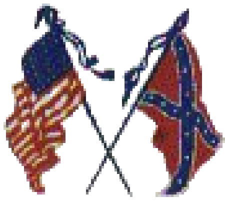
Pvt. Triplett wore both, but he kept that secret during the reunion. Organizers housed him in the Confederate camp. The Gettysburg Times quoted him saying he had "fooled everybody" because he had actually been in the Union Army for the entire war, a tale at odds with his military records.

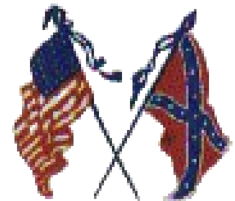
"We didn't want to leave the Union," Pvt. Triplett told the newspaper, "but our neighbors did."

Pvt. Triplett died of cancer days after returning from Gettysburg, at age 92. His family put pennies on his eyes and buried him on a hillside covered in holly, pine, oak and cedar.

In Wilkes County, the local Sons of Confederate Veterans of the Civil War put Confederate flags on tombstones of rebel soldiers. Mose Triplett's granite grave marker has no flag and is conspicuous in its neutrality. "He was a Civil War soldier," it reads.

In 1943, 13-year-old Irene and her mother, unable to fend for themselves, moved into the Wilkes County poorhouse. Locals remember it as a grim, two-story brick building on the outskirts of town.





Though just 10 years old, Irene's brother, Everette, ran away rather than live there, Charlie Triplett said. Everette Triplett made his way to Roxboro, N.C., and found work in a saw mill. He became a bulldozer operator and died in 1996.

Irene and Elida Triplett remained at the county home for 17 years. The facility shut down in 1960, and Irene and her mother moved into a new private nursing home.

Once a month, the two women would put their X marks on the VA pension checks, which helped pay for their care.

Elida Triplett died of cancer in 1967. Irene Triplett lived in the nursing home for more than half a century until she broke her hip last year and moved into the Wilkesboro skilled-nursing facility. Medicaid pays her expenses at the home, supplemented by the VA pension her father earned her in 1865.

Military Moms of the Civil War

By Erin Lindsay McCabe, Huff Post, May 9, 2014

I was shocked when I learned that during the Civil War, over 200 women served as soldiers -- drilling, guarding prisoners, spying, nursing, and seeing combat -- all while disguised as men. From the moment I learned of them, I have admired those women. But once I gave birth to my son in 2011, I was struck by overwhelming respect and amazement for the six documented women who did all that and did it while pregnant.

Known only from comrades' letters home, one of the six was an unidentified New Jersey woman who fought at the Seven Day's Battle during her first trimester. Between the fatigue, nausea, and hypersensitive sense of smell early pregnancy brings, the putrescence of being on the battlefield surrounded by unwashed men and festering bodies must have been nearly intolerable. Yet somehow she managed to press on, fighting and getting wounded at Antietam while in her second trimester. Instead of going home after such a harrowing experience, she returned to duty and earned a promotion to corporal. Though the men in her Company had noticed that her "tent mate" often took her place for guard duty, Samuel S. Partridge described her as "a real soldierly, thoroughly military fellow." She went on to fight (in her third trimester!) at Fredericksburg, after which she was promoted again, this time to sergeant. Within a month, the woman went into labor while guarding on picket duty, according to Colonel Adrian Root of the 94th New York Infantry, and had to be carried to the nearest farmhouse/field hospital -- quite possibly the worst birth plan I've ever heard. She delivered a baby boy, whose father was purportedly the unmarried woman's helpful tent mate. Understandably, the incident became the topic of many letters home and general gossip throughout the Army of the Potomac, which is how we even know about this woman today.

Elijah H.C. Cavins' letters are the reason we know about an unidentified sergeant (another woman who got promoted up the ranks!) who fought at the Battle of Stone's River while five months pregnant. Like the nameless New Jersey woman, this officer "always attended to his various duties" and went completely undiscovered until the moment "he gave birth to a large boy."

Confederate sharpshooter Lucy Thompson Gauss was perhaps a tiny bit more cautious. She served beside her husband for 16 months before heading home in the final weeks of her pregnancy. Sadly, War Department records indicate that her husband died at the Battle of Fredericksburg the second week of December 1862, around the same time their daughter was born. It speaks volumes of her grief that although the baby could only have been days old, Gauss returned to the Confederate Army in an unsuccessful attempt to bring her husband's body home. It also speaks of her desperate situation as a widow and single mother that she continued on to Richmond to claim her husband's back pay and enlistment bounty. What about her own pay? The historical records don't say.

Historical records also don't detail how two female Confederate prisoners of war managed to conceal their identities during their pregnancies, escaping detection despite routine searches of new detainees and extremely close quarters. One of these women, described only as "a portly fellow" in fellow POW Griffin Frost's Camp and Prison Journal, gave birth to "a fine boy." The other, "a rebel officer" according to the Sandusky Commercial Register, also delivered a "bouncing boy" and was "undoubtably a woman." Even more amazing than hiding their pregnancies until the last minute is that the women carried the pregnancies to term at all, given the terrible conditions at the prisons where rations were meager and primitive barracks were barely heated. There is no doubt that these ladies were tough.

Perhaps the most uncomfortable Civil War "birth story" belongs to another soldier whose name is also lost to history. In 1865 Sergeant Joseph

Cross of the 29th Connecticut Infantry (Colored), wrote home to his wife:
“One Question I wish to ask Did you Ever hear of A Man having a child [?] there is such a case in our regiment & in Company F she played man Ever since wee have been [out] the child war born feb 28 it rained hard all day and now she is in the hospital.”
At the time, the regiment was serving in the trenches outside Petersburg -- all I can think of is that poor woman, giving birth in the mud and rain in miserable February. Unbelievable.
How these six women were able to perform their duties during the exhaustion and nausea of the first trimester is hard to fathom. Perhaps the help that some of them had from the fathers of their children, combined with sheer determination, made it possible. Maybe, like most male soldiers, they haled from working-class or farm backgrounds, and were used to hard physical labor and poor living conditions. But how did they conceal their growing bodies as the pregnancies progressed? How were the men around them so clueless? Ill-fitting uniforms are one possibility, or the fact that most men had never seen women in pants. Or perhaps it truly was, as Herman Weiss suggested in a letter home to his wife, after she too wondered how a pregnant corporal in the 6th New York Heavy Artillery had gone undetected, "there is a great many women that don’t show much anyway."

The Lives of Emma Edmonds

By CARL SENNA, New York Times, April 21, 2014

In 1864, with huge casualties from battles in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, the Union enlisted thousands of volunteer nurses from the North, among them a reclusive 23-year-old woman named Sarah Emma Edmonds. But this wasn’t the first time Edmonds had volunteered for service. Nor was there any indication that this shy woman nursing soldiers in West Virginia had spent years behind enemy lines as a spy
Much of that story came out earlier that year, when Hurlburt, Williams & Co., a publisher in Hartford, announced that Edmonds had written an account of the war, the cumbersomely titled “Nurse and Spy in the Union Army, Comprising The Adventures and Experiences of a Woman in Hospitals, Camps, and Battle-Fields, Illustrated.” It went on to sell 175,000 copies, the proceeds from which Edmonds gave to help disabled veterans.
Edmonds begins her wartime narrative with a threadbare account of her early life in New Brunswick, Canada, leaving out, for example, her birth name, Emma Edmondson. The fifth daughter of a dirt farmer, she grew into a “lithe, hard-muscled, wiry girl,” attending a log-house school in her rural Anglican parish. The Maritime’s harsh winters, seasonal harvest and farm demands often interrupted her class work in the few months reserved for the school calendar.
She related how her favorite fictional heroine, the protagonist of “Fanny Campbell, The Female Pirate Captain, A Tale of the Revolution,” inspired her preference for wearing homespun trousers. Sitting fully astride farm horses, she jockeyed them through the woods, and she learned to take game with one shot.
When Edmonds’s father, deep in debt, announced an arranged marriage between Emma and his creditor, she ran away from home. At first she concealed her identity as Emma Edmonds, but just as her father and his relatives closed in on her, she vanished, exchanging her vulnerable identity as a single young white female to that of a white gentleman, Franklin Thompson, a young traveling book salesman.
“Frank Thompson” migrated across a then-porous international border to work and live in the United States. She closely guarded her true identity while selling books in New England, until she ran into a youthful Canadian boy on her trips. His identity has been lost to history, but she allows in her memoir that he was James R., someone she grew up with. When war broke out in 1860, he volunteered in Co. F. Michigan Ninth Regiment. She followed him to Washington, where she claims he fell to a sniper.
After the death of her friend, Edmonds revealed her identity as a woman, volunteered as a nurse for the Army of the Potomac, treating wounded Confederate prisoners. That work brought her to the attention of Allan Pinkerton, the founder of President Lincoln’s Secret Service.
As a former police detective in Chicago, Pinkerton had found that some spies, just as some criminals, often trusted women with secrets that they were reluctant to reveal to male associates. And those women often gossiped about the secrets to other women, even strangers. He immediately recruited her.
Later, when he needed her to pose as a man, he her go back undercover as Pvt. Franklin “Frank” Thompson, volunteer, Co. F, Ninth Michigan Infantry. Edmonds spent the next two years eliciting information from wounded Confederate P.O.W.s. In 1863 Pinkerton had her change her identity again, this time as “Ned,” a free black man, who roamed the rebel-held roads of Virginia – an episode that makes for the most

spectacular, and barely credible, parts of Edmonds's memoir.

Photo- National Park Service - Emma Edmonds

Edmonds assumed other disguises as well: At one point she masqueraded as a spying debonair gentleman so effectively that a Southern belle pursued her romantically. In one moving encounter, she tends to a dying soldier whose last wish is not to be medically examined but to simply be buried right away without being disrobed. The dying soldier, Edmonds guesses, is a woman, like Edmonds and an estimated 1,500 other disguised soldiers on both sides.

In her retelling, Edmonds never flinches from combat; indeed, as one rebel soldier menaces her with his pistol, she shoots him at point blank range in the face. But in one harrowing adventure she swims a river and contracts malaria. Unwilling to reveal her gender in a military hospital, she soldiers on through several episodes of malarial attacks, until she almost dies during one of them. She recovers just enough to abandon her male disguise as Frank Thompson, in order to seek treatment in an Ohio hospital. During her convalescence, she penned her memoir. When her manuscript was first published, she volunteered for service in the West Virginia hospitals.

After the war, Edmonds applied for military benefits, but she found the Army unwilling to award them for her service under the name Franklin Thompson. Military records did show that a soldier named Franklin Thompson deserted his post April 22, 1863 – and, as a deserter, he was ineligible for veterans' benefits or pension. Since the identity of Union spies remained classified, the Army could not verify records of a female spy known to have served in combat under that name.

Fortunately, when officers from the regiment learned of Edmonds's true identity, they petitioned the government on her behalf. Despite additional pleas by supportive representatives, it took a private bill passed by vote of Congress to force declassification of Army records to confirm her military service.

Edmonds settled in La Porte, Tex., where she died in 1898. She was laid to rest with full military honors in Houston's Grand Army of the Republic Cemetery – the only woman to receive such treatment.

Washington & Lee students demand removal of Confederate flags, decry view of Lee's legacy

By Luanne Rife | The Roanoke Times

Some Washington & Lee University law students want the university to live by its honor code and stop glorifying its namesake by acknowledging the dishonorable side of both Robert E. Lee and W&L.

Seven multiracial students, calling themselves The Committee, have demanded that W&L remove the flags of the Confederacy from the campus and Lee Chapel, acknowledge and apologize for participating in chattel slavery, recognize Martin Luther King Day on the undergraduate campus and ban neo-Confederates from marching across campus to the chapel on Lee-Jackson Day.

If their demands are not met by Sept. 1, they will engage in civil disobedience.

University President Kenneth Ruscio on Wednesday issued a letter to the W&L community that said "we take these students' concerns seriously. The issues they have raised are important, and we intend to address them."

Ruscio said W&L invites a prominent speaker during MLK Legacy Week; the undergraduate faculty decides whether classes are held on MLK day; the eight battle flags in Lee Chapel, representing armies of the Confederate States of America, are educational and historical, and the university does not observe Lee-Jackson Day.

His message did not indicate whether W&L would meet any of the students' demands, but that he invited them to meet with the University Committee on Inclusiveness and Campus Climate that has been holding focus groups on these same issues.

The students said that they emailed the committee four days ago and had yet to hear a response.

Washington & Lee last fall announced W&L Promise, a program that covers tuition for students whose families earn less than $75,000 a year as a way to broaden the student body diversity along "social-economic,

geographical, racial, ethnic — the widest possible use of the term," Ruscio said then. The private school in Lexington, among the nation's first universities, has in recent years promoted itself as an inclusive, diverse institution.

Anjelica Hendricks and Dominik Taylor, two of the seven law students who formed the protest committee, said they bought into W&L's message at first. Both grew up in Virginia and understand the culture but also know that history needs to be presented in its context.

"As a native of Virginia, I understand that every prestigious school in Virginia is named after a slave owner. I went to James Madison University," Hendricks said. "JMU was very comfortable. The name of the institution didn't matter. It was all about the atmosphere."

She found W&L and Lexington welcoming when she visited, but the experience soured immediately upon moving in.

"During orientation we had to go inside Lee Chapel and sign an honor contract to uphold our honor according to the honor of Robert E. Lee," she said. Signing that contract in the shadow of a slave owner, and beneath plaques honoring Confederate soldiers and battle flags bowing to a movement to keep black people enslaved is hurtful, she said.

"I'm a native of Richmond. I know what it's like to remember the past; however, I didn't feel the racism and disrespect as I did in being asked to uphold an honor that aligns with the views of Lee," she said.

The Committee draws upon the honor code in presenting its grievances. "The time has come for us, as students, to ask that the university hold itself responsible for its past and present dishonorable conduct and for the racist and dishonorable conduct of Robert E. Lee."

Lee, a native Virginian and West Point graduate, resigned his commission in the U.S. Army at the outbreak of the Civil War and commanded the Army of Northern Virginia during most of the fighting. He was named president of the then-Washington College in Lexington months after his surrender at Appomattox and died in office in 1870. The college trustees added his name to George Washington's almost immediately. The former commander-in-chief of Confederate forces is buried in Lee Chapel. Confederate Lt. Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson is buried nearby in Lexington.

Taylor said that even if the university does not officially celebrate Lee-Jackson Day, it hurts students and faculty of color by granting a permit to neo-Confederates to march across campus and hold a ceremony at Lee Chapel. The private university can ban this group, the law students said.

"They are not entitled to not be offended," said Brandon Dorsey, commander of Camp 1296 of the Lexington-based Stonewall Brigade of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, who each year organizes Lee-Jackson Day in Lexington. "Second, it's an indictment on the university that they aren't better educating their students on the values and principles that Lee stood for that they would consider having these demands met."

Dorsey said Lee was called the "marble man because he was considered exemplary for his behavior toward others." He said Lee only had slaves when he acted as executor of his father-in-law's estate for a brief period of time and that he released them.

The students said that benign view of Lee whitewashes history.

Lee's wife inherited 196 slaves upon her father's death in 1857, and the will required that they were to be freed within five years. Historian Elizabeth Brown Pryor, who wrote "Reading the Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee through His Private Letters," has said that Lee continued to work the slaves for five years to make the estates more profitable. He broke up families, hired slaves to other families and petitioned the court to extend their servitude. They were granted their freedom on the same day the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect.

The students want W&L to acknowledge that Lee owned slaves and oversaw their beatings.

Dorsey said W&L's alumni would protest if the university bowed to the students' demands to "remove Lee's legacy." He said he isn't surprised by the demands and suspects liberal professors are behind the movement just as they were in pressuring the city of Lexington to ban all but government flags from its street poles. Dorsey's group lost a lawsuit against the city's flag ban.

"The university is a hotbed of these kinds," he said. "They would fit better in Communist China than in the United States. They don't have the right to control other people's actions."

Ruscio wrote in his letter that he impaneled a special committee last year "to explore the history of African Americans at Washington and Lee and to provide a report to me and to the community." So far, the group has "met in only a preliminary manner," he said.