

The Tomb of General Hancock



In the mid-1970s, members of Camp # 200 received a letter from a college student name Brian Pohanka. Brian, who would become one of the top Civil War historians and preservationists in the country, informed the camp that the tomb of Union Major General Winfield Scott Hancock, located in Montgomery Cemetery in Norristown, PA was being vandalized. The Hancock Restoration Committee was formed and confirmed Pohanka's report. Chairman of the committee was Mr. David Charles, a World War II veteran and an expert on Civil War photos and images. A national campaign was launched, which included contacting many Civil War organizations and advertising in several Civil War publications. Many members of Civil War roundtables and historical organizations nationwide joined in the effort. Civil War shows in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia were also manned to join forces. A strong supporter, the Civil War Library and Museum in Philadelphia, became involved when the Old Baldy Civil War Round Table was formed in January 1977.

One moving incident occurred when the committee received a letter with a donation of five dollars from a gentleman in Norristown named Winfield Scott Port. Mr. Port, in his 90s and blind at the time, was living with his daughter. His father was a Civil War veteran with the famed Pennsylvania Bucktails. We called Mr. Port to thank him for his donation. His daughter suggested that Mr. Port would be delighted if we could find time to visit him. We immediately agreed. In honor of the occasion, we presented him with a Kepi with a bucktail attached. Stroking it with tears in his eyes, he remembered attending the Gettysburg reunion as a child with his father. Dave Charles said he did the same with his father in 1938. "No," said Mr. Port, "I mean the 1913 reunion! I shook hands with General Sickles." We looked at each other in amazement. Making our exit, we all shook hands with Mr. Port. We then realized that now we could claim that we shook the hand of a man who shook the hand of Dan Sickles!

In 1976, the tomb was cleaned up, landscaped, and protected with a chain-link fence. The committee had a re-dedication ceremony on October 24, led by Dave Charles, the Chair of the Hancock Tomb Committee. Plaques were restored and replaced. A flagpole was erected donated by the Civil War Round Table of Eastern Pennsylvania, Inc. (Allentown). From that day on the Old Baldy Civil War Round Table of Philadelphia was well represented at the annual Memorial Day services at the tomb. Over the years many organizations participated in the ceremony. Most important of all we had the blessing and support of the Historical Society of Montgomery County owner of Montgomery Cemetery.



As an aside, noted historian and battlefield guide Ed Bearss has declared that General Winfield Scott Hancock was the finest corps commander on either side in the Civil War. Donations were received throughout the country, half of which were from individuals and organizations in the South. It was well-known that General Hancock was a fair and effective leader while serving as a military governor in the South after the war.