

Old Baldy Civil War Round Table of Philadelphia



September 12, 2013, The One Hundred and Fiftieth Year of the Civil War

“Camp William Penn and Its Influence on the Civil War”



The meeting on
Thursday, September 12, will
take place
at **Camden County
College at 7:15 PM**
in the **Connector Building
Room 101 Forum,
Civic Hall, Atrium.**

Dr. James Paradis will be speaking on the historical back-
ground that led to the establishment of Camp William Penn
in the summer of 1863 in Cheltenham, PA, which became



the largest
site for the
training of
United States
Colored
Troops
(U.S.C.T.) in
the North.
He will then
outline the
history of the
camp itself,
highlight
some of the
more dramati-
c events that

occurred there, and further illustrate some of the important
actions and impact thereof attributed to U.S.C.T. regiments
who trained there between 1863 and 1865.

Dr. James Paradis teaches at Arcadia University and Doane
Academy where he is Dean of the Upper School. He has
authored two books, *Strike the Blow for Freedom: The 6th
United States Colored Infantry in the Civil War*, and *African
Americans and the Gettysburg Campaign*.

Dr. Paradis serves on the board which preserves the site of
Camp William Penn. He was historical consultant and nar-
rator for the documentary film, *Black Soldiers in Blue: The
Story of Camp William Penn* in 2009. In 2011 the NAACP
of Cheltenham, PA awarded a Certificate of Recognition for
his contributions preserving African American history.

Notes from the President...

The summer is drawing to a close as the Fall campaign
begins. **Kerry** has some great programs lined up for us,
our trip to see Old Baldy is next month and plans continue
on our Hancock projects. Hope everyone had a safe and
enjoyable Labor Day weekend and is ready to continue the
expansion of our Round Table.

Our discussion last month about the war in the East and
the West was very fruitful. We were glad to see almost
everyone contribute as members learned from each other
and our guests experienced a round table discussion. Many
great topics were provided afterwards for future presenta-
tions and debates. Thank you to all who made it an enjoy-
able evening. This month **Jim Paradis** will enlighten us on
Camp William Penn which celebrates its 150th anniversary
nine days later.

We have twenty folks signed up for our trip to visit Old
Baldy at the GAR museum in the John Ruan House on
Griscom Street in Philadelphia on October 19th. **Hugh
Boyle** has an informative time planned for us. Sign up at
the meeting or let Vice President **Bob Russo** know if you
would like to join us. Hope you were able to attend some
of the Civil War Events before our meeting that were listed
in last month's newsletter. We look forward to hearing
about them, perhaps in a future newsletter.

I attended the rededication of the Swamp Angel monument
in Trenton last month and ran into friends of the Round
Table, **Howard and Carol Ruhl**. Howard now portrays
Gideon Welles. I also supported our longtime member **Jim
Heenehan's** excellent presentation on the court-martial
of Colonel Ira Grover of the 7th Indiana infantry at last
month's DelVall CWRT meeting. Great job Jim! Plan on
being at Historic La Mott on September 21st to commemo-
rate the anniversary of Camp William Penn. [Details avail-
able in the newsletter.] Please volunteer if you are able.

Look forward to seeing everyone and meeting new friends
on the 12th as we continue to grow our Round Table and
spread our message to folks in South Jersey.

Enjoy the closing days of summer.

Rich Jankowski, President

**Please join us at 7:15 p.m. on Thursday, September 12th, at Camden County College,
Blackwood Campus, Connector Building - Room 101.**

The Strange Tale of Ephraim Wisler

by Timothy H. Smith
 Gettysburg Licensed Battlefield Guide
 Blue/Gray Magazine Holiday 2003

While many are familiar with the fact that Mary Virginia "Ginnie" Wade was the only Gettysburg civilian killed during the battle, few are aware of other citizen casualties. Several persons of the town were wounded and a number of the area's residents were taken prisoner by the Confederate army. Others would die within days or weeks of the battle as a direct result of the fighting. One such casualty was Ephraim Wisler, a 31-year-old blacksmith who lived three miles west of Gettysburg along the Chambersburg Pike.

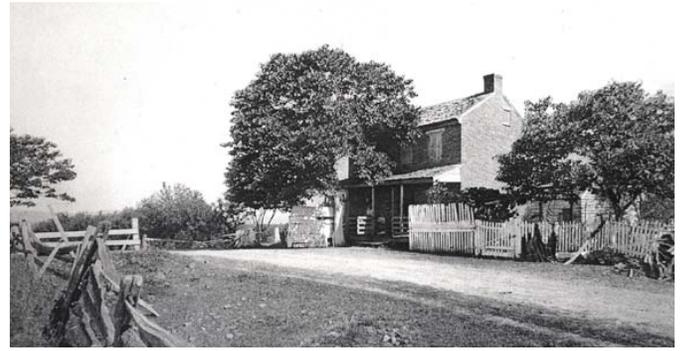
On the morning of July 1, 1863, a Union vidette post was located a short distance west of his house. It was from the yard of Wister's house that Lt. Marcellus Jones of the 8th Illinois Cavalry fired the first shot of the battle as a column of Southerners approached on the pike.

In response to the presence of Union cavalry, a gun from the Fredericksburg Artillery was unlimbered in the pike on a rise of ground west of the Wisler house and near the home of Samuel Lohr. In an article for the Gettysburg Compiler in 1903, local historian Aaron Sheely recorded the effects of the fire from that gun:



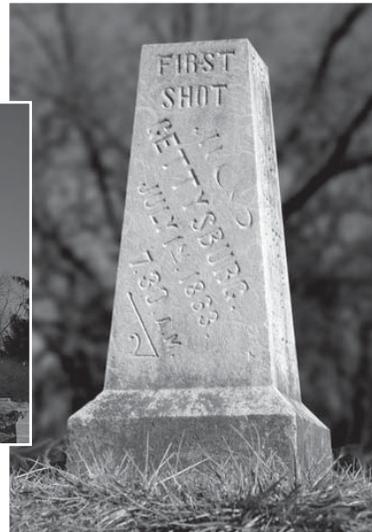
Wisler House 2000s.

The first Cannon shot in the battle of Gettysburg was fired, the Confederates from a battery stationed on Lohr's Hill, several hundred yards East of Marsh Creek bridge on the Chambersburg Pike. On the first hill east of that position, in the brick house at present owned and occupied by Capt. James Mickley, resided at the time of the battle, a blacksmith by the name of Ephraim Wisler. Noticing certain strange movements and actions of small bodies



Wisler House 1890s.

of armed men in vicinity of his house, but not dreaming that they were the advance guard of the Confederate army, Mr Wisler stepped from the gate opening from his yard to the pike to observe what was going on. At this instant the first gun, stationed on Lohr's Hill, as (already described, was discharged, the ball of which, a twelve pound solid shot, struck the pike immediately in front of him, plowing up the solid road bed and scattering the ground over him. The shock to his nervous system was so great that he became completely prostrated. He took to his bed soon afterwards and never rose from it.



First Shot Marker.

Records indicate that Ephraim Wisler did in fact pass away on August 11, 1863. He was buried in the Lower Marsh Creek Presbyterian Church Cemetery less than a mile from his home. At this time, however, no additional evidence has surfaced to suggest that his death was battle related. Ephraim left behind a widow and two small children. Recently the historic Wisler house was purchased by

the National Park Service and efforts are now underway to restore the property.

Was he the first civilian to die from a combat injury at the Battle of Gettysburg?

Camp William Penn

by Steve Conrad
www.usct.org

In the heart of La Mott, on the grounds of the Community Center, is a stone marker memorializing "Camp William Penn: 1863-1865. Training camp for colored troops enlisted into the United States Army." The monument was "erected by the Allied Veterans Association of Pennsylvania" in 1943. Of the troops trained at the site, two were marked for special combat performance: the 6th and 8th USCT. (United States Colored Troops).

Our Civil War was at first a war for the Union. As such, the war was viewed as a "white man's war." Those blacks who

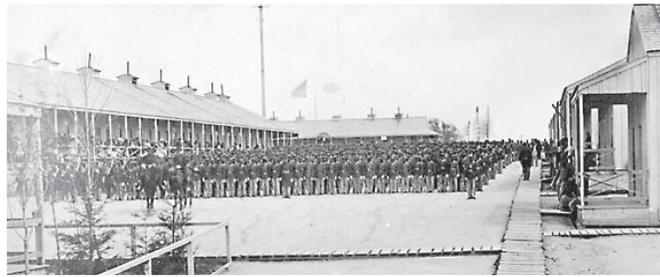


Camp William Penn original gate.

came forward were rudely turned away. Generals Hunter and Fremont tried to enlist black troops, only to be slapped

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down by an administration worried about holding the Border States in the Union. As Union defeat after defeat piled up in the Eastern Theater, the remorseless logic of war, as well as the pleadings of abolitionists, led first to use of blacks as "Contraband" labor units, then as full scale military units.



Soldiers at Camp William Penn

Northern blacks yearned to get into the fight. Their motives were complex, but revolved around a desire to "prove" themselves worthy of equal citizenship. They knew that the war meant the death of slavery, but not necessarily the birth of freedom or equality. They hoped to prove, to the racist white population in the North, their worth in the crucible of battle.

With the January 1, 1863 issue of the Emancipation Proclamation, without a particularity ringing endorsement of their use, Lincoln authorized recruitment of blacks "to garrison forts, positions, stations and other places and to man vessels of all sorts in said service."

Eleven U.S.C.T. regiments were trained at what was to become Camp William Penn. Before there could be combat soldiers, recruitment and training establishments for them had to be set up. By the end of 1863, authorities were authorized to "enlist into the service of the United States for three years or during the war all suitable colored men who may offer themselves for enlistment." Recruits from Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey were to be trained at Camp William Penn, one of eight northern camps set up for the training of black troops. Camp William Penn has the important distinction of being the only one set up exclusively to train black troops.

A June 19, 1863 gathering of prominent citizens in Sansom Street Hall resolved to form a committee to raise black regiments. On the same date Lieut. Col. Charles C. Ruff....(announced that)....he had "orders to authorize the formation of one regiment of ten companies, colored troops, each company to be eighty strong, to be mustered into the United States service and provided for, in all respects, the same as white troops." A week later, Camp William Penn was to be established to receive the black recruits.

If the inauguration of Camp William Penn was a week later, on June 26th, it was none too soon. Confederate General Jubal Anderson Early was in Gettysburg routing a command of Pennsylvania militia, then pushing this dusty regiment toward York, and the Susquehanna River. On the same day Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Gregg Curtin issued a call for 60,000 three-month militia to turn back Lee's incursion into the state. Why, with the crisis upon them the state authorities turned down the services of a company of motivated black volunteers is a mystery. Blacks would be allowed to enlist, in state units, but for three years, or the war, and at lower pay than white enlistees. These conditions did not deter blacks from rallying to the colors.

June 30 saw several hundred black men marching on Sixth Street bound for Chestnut Street. They had no arms or uniforms but were led by "fife and drum and inspiring banners," and were marching to their newly organized camp in

the Cheltenham Hills. This was over the city limits in what is now Cheltenham Township. The first site for the camp was on the estate of financier Jay Cooke, at the junction of Church Road (now route 73) and Washington Lane. The camp was located near rail connections, the newly constructed North Penn Railroad, on donated land and in the middle of an area

of sympathetic Quakers. The location was equally good for other reasons. Armed black men were not training in the city with its relatively racist population. It seems clear that this first "draft"* of men was destined for the Jay Cooke Estate. This would make June 30, the first use of the camp. The camp, though first established on the Jay Cooke estate, was not ideal. Then, as well as now, the area was not parade ground level. A new site was selected just outside the Philadelphia City limits. This is now Cheltenham Avenue and Penrose Avenue. The new site was close enough to "Roadside", the home of Lucretia Mott, for her to comment that "the barracks make a show from our back windows."

By Independence Day, 1863, the camp was open for business. This was to be the largest of the training camps set up for black soldiers. Eventually, 10,940 men passed through the camp. The camp commander was Lieutenant Colonel Louis Wagner. Wagner was given command of the post at his own request. Though German born, he brought with him American combat experience. He was an officer in the 88th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry. In this service he had been badly wounded at Bull Run. Other officers were chosen from units in the field.

A total of eleven regiments passed through the gates of Camp William Penn. The first training units were the 3rd, 6th, and 8th U.S.C.T. The Sixth Regiment may have been the first to leave for the battlefields of the South. As early as July 9, 1863, soldiers were mustered into the Sixth. This makes this unit, with the Third Regiment, the first to undergo recruitment and training.

Third Regiment Infantry USCT Commanding Officer Colonel Benjamin G. Tilghman

Organized at Camp William Penn in August, 1863, this regiment was attached to the Fourth Brigade, Tenth Corps, and was stationed at Morris Island, Charleston Harbor S. C., at Hilton Head S. C., and in February, 1864, transferred to Vogdes' Division, District of Florida 9. With this and other commands its subsequent service was confined to the State of Florida. The "3rd" participated in the assaults on Forts Wagner and Gregg, and in operations at Charleston, S. C.; also in a series of expeditions and actions in Florida. For a considerable period the regiment served as heavy artillery. The command was retained in the service for garrison duty at Jacksonville, Fernandina and other points to October 21st, 1865, when it was mustered out.

Battles And Services

Operations on Morris Island, S. C., Operations on Forts Wagner and Gregg Expedition to Florida, Expedition to Lake City, Fla., Expedition to Camp Milton, Fla., Expedi-

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tion to Bryant's plantation

Sixth Regiment Infantry USCT

Commanding Officer Colonel John W. Ames

Leaving Camp William Penn on October 14th, 1863 the "6th" joined the army at Fortress Monroe, and was, in the course of its history, attached to the Eighteenth, Tenth and Twenty-fifth Corps. In its two years of service, the regiment had a more active part in a field of operations covering a large portion of two States than any other colored regiment originating in Pennsylvania. With its camp at Yorktown, Va., the regiment accompanied expeditions into North Carolina and to various points on the peninsula, joining the colored division under General B. F. Butler on the James River in May 1864, and participating in battles and operations incident to the siege of Petersburg and Richmond Its most notable record was gained at the battle of Chaffin's Farm (New Market Heights), where it lost most heavily. Here a company, led by Capt. John McMurray, went into the charge with thirty-two men and returned with but three. This was the greatest average company loss recorded of any troops in the course of the war. It was in this charge that Captain Robert B. Beath, subsequently commissioned Lieutenant-Colonel lost his leg.

With the Twenty-Fifth Corps in the operations of the North Carolina Coast at the beginning of 1865, the "6th" was in the advance upon and capture of Fort Fisher, and in the following campaign, which cleared eastern North Carolina of the enemy and finally lead to a junction with General Sheridan's army at Raleigh and the capitulation of Gen. Johnston, after which the "6th" performed garrison duty at Wilmington, N. C., to its muster out on September 20th, 1865. The chaplain, Rev. Jeremiah W. Asher, lost his life at Wilmington through attendance on men suffering from malignant fever.

Total Losses

Killed or mortally wounded officers...	8
Killed or mortally wounded men...	79
Died of disease officers...	5
Died of disease men...	132
Wounded and missing officers and men...	168

Battles And Services

Expedition against Richmond Skirmish near Williamsburg, Expedition - Yorktown to New Kent Court House, City Point, Petersburg (June 9th 1864), Butler's operations against Petersburg and Richmond, Petersburg (assault June 15th 1864), Petersburg (June 16th, 18th, 1864), Dutch Gap, Chaffin's Farm (Fort Harrison), Fort Fisher (December 1864), Fort Fisher (January, 1865), Sugar Loaf Battery, North Carolina, Occupation of Wilmington North Carolina, Skirmish Phillips Cross Roads, North Carolina

Eighth Regiment Infantry USCT

Commanding Officer Colonel John W. Fuller

This regiment was ready for the field in December, 1863, and left Philadelphia for Hilton Head, S. C., on January 16th, 1863 from which point it was ordered to Jacksonville,

David Bowser USCTs
Regimental Flags designer



**3rd UNITED STATES COLORED SOLDIERS
"RATHER DIE FREEMEN, THAN LIVE TO BE SLAVES"**



**PRESENTED BY A COMMITTEE OF LADIES OF PHILA OCT. 1863
3rd USCT Regimental Flag**

Fla. At the battle of Olustee, a point about fifty miles westward from that city, on February 20th the "8th" met with disastrous losses. Among the wounded was Capt. (afterward Lieut. Col.) George E. Wagner, brother of Gen. Louis Wagner. After several months of further campaigning in Florida, the regiment was sent to the Tenth Corps, operating in front of Richmond and Petersburg. The "8th" was engaged in the battles of Chaffin's Farm (Fort Harrison), Darbytown Road and the second Fair Oaks. After wintering in the trenches before Richmond the regiment participated in the final struggle around Petersburg, and was present at the scene of the surrender at Appomattox. After several weeks of duty at Petersburg, the "8th" was sent by transport to Texas, serving there until November. The regiment was mustered out on the 20th, and finally discharged at Philadelphia December 12th, 1865.

Total Losses

Killed or mortally wounded officers...	4
Killed or mortally wounded men...	115
Died of disease men...	132
Wounded, not mortally men...	245
Captured or missing men...	72

Battles

Olustee, Bermuda Hundred, Chaffin's Farm, Darbytown Road, Siege of Petersburg, Hatcher's Run, Fall of Petersburg Pursuit of Lee, Appomattox Court House. *Note This regiment is included in the well-known and often quoted list of "Three Hundred Fighting Regiments."* Fox.

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Twenty-second Regiment Infantry USCT**Commanding Officer****Colonel Joseph B. Kiddoo**

This regiment proceeded from Camp William Penn to Yorktown, Va., at the end of January, 1864, and as a part of Hinck's Division, Eighteenth Corps, participated in Butler's demonstrations against Petersburg and Richmond, and was engaged in the attack on Fort Powhattan incident to Grant's advance to and across the James River. The "22nd" was active in the heavy siege operations beginning in June, 1864, and ending with the fall of Petersburg and Richmond, fighting in many notable battles incident to that period of the war. It was honored by selection as one of the first Union regiments sent into Richmond. It was detailed as part of the escort at the funeral obsequies of President Lincoln at Washington, after which it was sent to the Eastern Shore of Maryland in pursuit of the assassins. The "22nd" was now transported to Texas as part of the Twenty-fifth Corps, where it was kept on patrol duty along the Rio Grande River for four months. The regiment was mustered out October 16th, 1865.

Total Losses

Killed or died from wounds officers...	2
Killed or died from wounds men...	70
Died of disease officers	1
Died of disease men...	144

Battles And Services

Engaged on duty near Yorktown, Butler's operations, Bermuda Hundred, Fort Powhattan, Dutch Gap, Assault at Petersburg, Chaffin's Farm (New Market), Fair Oaks (October 27th, 28th, 1864), Chaffin's Farm (November 4th), In trenches before Richmond, Occupation of Richmond, Duty in Texas to end of enlistment

Twenty-fourth Regiment Infantry USCT**Commanding Officer COLONEL Orlando Brown**

This regiment was moved from Camp William Penn to Washington, May 5th, 1865. After a brief stay at Camp Casey it was assigned to guard prisoners at Point Lookout, Md., and subsequently to patrol and provost duty at Richmond, Va., and points in Virginia, with headquarters at Burkeville. It was mustered out at Richmond, October 1st, 1865.

Twenty-fifth Regiment Infantry USCT**Commanding Officer Colonel Gustavus A. Scroggs**

The right wing of this regiment left Philadelphia March 15th, 1864 and was assigned to garrison duty at Beaufort, N. C., later joining the left wing at New Orleans. In October, the command was sent to Pensacola, Fla., in which state it was garrisoned at Forts Pickens and Barrancas to the conclusion of its service, December 6th, 1865.

Thirty- Second Regiment Infantry USCT**Commanding Officer Colonel George W Baird**

Organized at Camp William Penn in the spring of 1864 the "32nd" was ordered to Hilton Head, S. C., arriving there on April 27th. A few weeks later the command was sent to Morris Island, joining the troops then operating against Charleston. Here and at points along the South Carolina coast the regiment was on duty throughout its term of ser-

vice. It was mustered out August 22nd, 1865.

Total Losses

Killed or died of wounds officers...	2
Killed or died of wounds men...	35
Died of disease men...	113

Battles And Services

Duty at Hilton Head, Morris Island siege operations, Expedition to Boyd's Neck, Honey Hill, Raid on Savannah Railroad, Devaux Neck, James Island, Occupation of Charleston, Pottcr expedition, Dingle's Mills, StatesBoro, Camden, Boydkin's Mills, Beach Creek.

Forty-first Regiment Infantry USCT**Commanding Officer Colonel Llewellyn F. Haskell**

This regiment left Camp William Penn October 18th, 1864 proceeding to the vicinity of Richmond, there being attached to Hinck's Division, Tenth Corps. The regiment remained with the Army of the Potomac until May 25th, 1865 being then sent by sea to join the Twenty-fifth Corps in Texas, where it was engaged on guard and patrol duty. In September, 1865, the "41st" was reduced to a battalion of four companies. It was mustered out at Brownsville, November 10th, and disbanded at Philadelphia on December 14th, 1865

Battles And Services

Deep Bottom, before Richmond, Pair Oaks (October 27th, 28th, 1864), Picket duty at Chaffin's Farm, Hatcher's Run, Fall of Petersburg, Pursuit of Lee, Appomattox Court House, Duty at Erlenburg, Texas

Forty-third Regiment Infantry USCT**Commanding Officer Colonel Stephen B. Yeoman**

Organized at Camp William Penn, this regiment was stationed at Annapolis April 18th, 1864. It was attached to the Ninth Corps from September to November, 1864, being then transferred to the Twenty-fifth Corps, and participated in the active campaigns incident to the siege of Petersburg and Richmond, being often engaged. After the conclusion of hostilities in Virginia, the regiment was dispatched to Texas. It was mustered out October 20th, and discharged at Philadelphia, November 30th, 1865.

Total Losses

Killed or died of wounds Officers...	3
Killed or died of wounds men...	38
Died of disease men	188

Battles And Services

Campaign from the Rapidan to the James River before Petersburg, Operations against Richmond, Weldon Railroad, Poplar Grove Church, Hoydton Plank Road, Hatcher's Run, Before Richmond through the winter, Hatcher's Run, Fall of Petersburg, pursuit of Lee, Appomattox Court House, Duty at Petersburg and City Point, Duty on the Rio Grande River to end of enlistment.

Forty-fifth Regiment Infantry USCT**Commanding Officer Colonel Ulysses Doubleday**

This regiment was recruited during the summer of 1864. Four companies were ordered from Camp William Penn in July for garrison duty at Arlington Heights. Six companies left Philadelphia late in September and were assigned to the Tenth Corps. These companies experienced the fighting with which the command is credited; being engaged in

several of the battles incident to the investment of Petersburg and Richmond. The battalion from Arlington joined the later companies in camp at Chaffin's Farm and shared with them in the Appomattox campaign, after which the regiment was ordered to Texas along with other colored regiments and employed there on guard and provost duty. The "45th" was mustered out at Brownsville November 4th, 1865.

Battles And Services

Guard duty at Arlington (four companies), Movements around Richmond, Chaffin's Farm, Fort Harrison, Fair Oaks (October 27th, 28th, 1864), Winter in the trenches before Richmond, Hatcher's Run, Fall of Petersburg, Pursuit of

New Memorial at Gettysburg to honor Gettysburg's Culp Brothers

Dedicated July 6, 2013 at Gettysburg. The dedication was next to the Civil War Wax Museum on Steinwehr Avenue where the monument sits by the sidewalk. The memorial is another example on how the Civil War divided families. John was killed on July 2nd 1863 in the Culp's Hill area. William lived through the War.



Private John Wesley Culp,
Company B, 2nd Virginia
Infantry, CSA



Lieutenant William Culp,
Company F, 87th Pennsylvania
Infantry, USA

Today in Civil War History

Thursday September 12, 1861 Maryland Members Made Miserable

The greatest fear in Washington, D.C. at this point in the War was the possible secession of Maryland. With Virginia already gone on one side, Maryland's departure would leave the Federal capital entirely surrounded by Confederate territory, which would be embarrassing at the very least. A meeting of secessionist-minded state legislators had been scheduled for Sept. 17 in Frederick, Md., far from the capital of Annapolis. Orders were quietly issued, and starting today, the gentlemen were quietly arrested. To decrease opportunities for further agitation they were taken for confinement to Ft. Warren in Boston Harbor.

Friday September 12, 1862 Harrisburg History Hastily Hidden

If Gen. George McClellan had no idea where Robert E. Lee and his army were located, the state officials of Pennsylvania had the strong suspicion that he was headed straight

Lee, Appomattox Court House, Guard duty at City Point, Duty on the Rio Grande to end of enlistment.

One Hundred And Twenty-seventh Regiment Infantry USCT Commanding Officer COLONEL Benjamin F. Tracy

This regiment was the last to leave Camp William Penn. It was ordered to City Point, Va., in September, 1864, and there attached to the Tenth Corps. Its movements and engagements were identical with those of the left wing of the "45th" Regiment, including the transfer after Lee's surrender to further duty in Texas. It was mustered out upon the Rio

Trivia

What special service unit was attached to a battery of field artillery to service guns, caissons, and limbers?

A traveling forge

for them. The geography, the road network, and an assumption that Lee would try to stay a prudent distance away from the Army of the Potomac made this a fairly logical possibility. Orders were issued in Harrisburg and Philadelphia today to box up the state's documents, bonds, archives and treasury and ship them to New York for safekeeping. A fair number of politicians decided to ride along on the train—just to keep the records safe, of course.

Saturday September 12, 1863 Dirty Deeds Dastardly Done

Northern Georgia and eastern Tennessee were the scenes of numerous skirmishes, probes, reconnaissances, and general nastiness today. If gathered together they would probably have added up to a sizeable battle, but spread out as they were around Chattanooga, they didn't amount to much. Sites where official skirmishes occurred included Rheatown, Tenn., and Leet's Tanyard, Alpine, the LaFayette Road, and Dirt Town, Georgia.

Monday September 12, 1864 Sheridan Suffering Shenandoah Sloth

President Abraham Lincoln and Gen. Ulysses S. Grant had a common worry today: Phil Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley. It wasn't that he was doing anything wrong; the problem was that he didn't seem to be doing much of anything at all. To Lincoln this was a worry because Sheridan was supposed to be catching Gen. Early's Confederate force, which had been raiding and rampaging as far north as Pennsylvania for most of the summer. Grant worried about this too, with the additional personal complication that Sheridan was a friend from the "western theater" who had been brought East and given an army at Grant's personal recommendation. One factor neither seems to have allowed for was that Sheridan was a cavalryman, and had never commanded large numbers of foot soldiers before.

www.civilwarinteractive.com

How I Became a Confederate Soldier

By R. M. Heater

Andy Turner www.gatehousepress.com,

I was born in Kentucky October 24, 1842. My father died, leaving one other boy besides me and two girls. One sister died, one married, and my brother joined the 30th Tennessee Regiment. This left my mother and me alone on the farm. Up to this time I had never done anything radically wrong. I felt that I was a servant of the Master, and had

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strong leanings toward becoming a preacher of the good old Baptist Church, of which Church my father was a devout member.

At this time it was very hard to hear from those in the army to get a letter to them. My brother had a chance to send a letter to us, which letter, together with many from his regiment to friends in Robertson County, Tenn., was sent by private conveyance. These letters reached Pleasant Hill Meetinghouse one meeting day and were laid on the horse block. There they were discovered by J. W. Swan, who proceeded to act as postmaster. Among these letters was one for me, but I never received it. Not far from the church lived a man who reported the letters to Col. Sam Johnson, the commander of the Federal troops at Franklin, Ky. Colonel Johnson ordered the arrest of Swan, and found on his person the letter addressed to me. He subsequently ordered my arrest, and had me carried to Franklin and put in jail. Subsequently he offered me release if I would join the Yankee army, which I refused.

A few days after this offer I was carried to Bowling Green, Ky., and put in the military prison. There were about thirty prisoners, and every few days some were taken out. What was done with them, I don't know; but shortly there were only eighteen of us left. I was very impatient in prison, and determined to do all I could to escape. I took into my confidence one O. W. Laney, of [Col. John S.] Scott's [1st] Louisiana Cavalry, and John Gafford, a member of [John Hunt] Morgan's command. Working together, we pulled the lathes and plastering from the ceiling overhead, catching the litter in a blanket, so it would not make a noise. We crept through this hole up into a garret, which had a back window. From there we got onto a roof next door, then to a shed roof, and onto the ground. (After we had been gone some time, eleven other prisoners escaped through the same hole.) We got out about one o'clock in the morning. I followed Laney and Gafford up the bank of Big Barren River. They said they were making for Floyd Lick, Jackson County, Tenn., on the Cumberland River.

However, at sunup the next day as we were making for the timber we were overtaken by a squad of cavalry and ordered back to Bowling Green under their escort. When we reached Bowling Green, we were carried before Colonel [Cicero] Maxwell, the commander of the post, and very roughly received. He cursed and swore vengeance against us, and told Laney and Gafford that he was very much inclined to have them both shot. He said to me that my looks showed I was a country boy, and if I had not attempted to escape he would have sent me home in a day or two, but now he did not suppose I would ever see my home. He sent us to a blacksmith's shop and had a thirty-pound ball and chain put on my leg and handcuffs on my wrists. The other two he had handcuffed together and their legs chained together, for he said he "would fix us so he could find us when he wanted us." We were then put in a small cell in jail, with guards all around. I soon began to realize that Colonel Maxwell was in earnest when he said he would put us where he could find us when he called for us.

Vick Potter, a Campellite preacher, was the jailer. He locked the doors of the cells every night about nine o'clock. In the morning when he went to feed the prisoners he would turn some of them out in the hall of the prison; but he always kept locked the small inside cell in which we were confined. With the assistance of some of the prisoners who were

turned into the hall we opened the door of our cell one dark night in December and hid ourselves to wait for the coming of the jailer. I had managed to slip the handcuff over my hand, and with the heavy ball I beat off the chains, but could not get the band off my leg. With the same ball I managed to free both my companions, though they also had the shackles still on their legs. We had planned for Laney to knock down Potter and make the break; but when he heard the jailer turn his key in the great door, an ague struck him, and he began to back down the hall. I was desperate; so when the jailer-priest had opened the door and stooped to pick up his lantern, I jerked open the door and threw myself upon him. So utterly unexpected was the onslaught that he fell in a heap on the floor, and we three escaped through the open door. Laney came last, and Potter grabbed him as he rushed by; but Laney was a very stout man, and succeeded in tearing loose from him. We knew that the guard house was next to the jail, and the sentinels were then making their rounds. We knew too that if they failed to stop us they would shoot us down; so we ran with all our might up the road, and if any fellows ever made good time we did. We ran about half a mile; and being entirely breathless, we hid in a dark place in a field to rest. Lying there concealed, we could hear the sentinel calling "Halt!" and then some shooting, I supposed, after us.

It was a dark night, and this time I was leading. We started for what I thought was the South, and I was right, for presently we struck the Louisville and Nashville Pike. Gafford and I were wearing boots; but Laney had on shoes, and the shackles rubbed and galled so that he stopped to try to stuff his pants in between the iron and his leg. While in this position stooping over we heard cavalry coming at full speed right in the direction we were going; so we crawled into the woods and hid in the bushes. I knew that they would guard the turnpike and railroad; so we left the pike, went on the east side, and traveled all the rest of the night, as we thought, southward. In some way we must have turned round, for at daylight next morning we heard the drum and fife for roll call at Bowling Green. We were just a mile from where we started, and it was snowing fast. We stayed hid in the bushes all that day; and if the land has not changed very much, I know I could find the path I walked up and down all day to keep from freezing.

We started again on our tramp at dark, and struck the railroad twelve miles from Bowling Green, traveled the ties till nearly to Frankfort, Ky., made a detour around the town, and again made the railroad our guide. We followed this till near daylight, when a short walk through the woods brought us to my brother-in-law's house and in a short distance of my mother's home. My brother filed the shackles from our legs and gave us the best breakfast I ever did eat. After breakfast we separated. Mr. Short took Gafford and Laney through Macon County down to the Cumberland River, and that night's journey was the last I heard of them. I went down into what is known as the Greenbrier country, which is in Robertson County, Tenn., where I spent the rest of that winter, and in the spring of 1864 I joined a Confederate company commanded by Capt. George Page. This is how I entered the army; how I got out is another story.

Trivia

What battle was the first to result in almost 25,000 casualties?

Shiloh, Tenn. (46 percent CSA, 54 percent USA)



Jim's Diorama July 3, 1863

Here are 2 sets of Pickett's Charge dioramas. In the first, Lee & Longstreet watch the attack while Garnett & Armistead advance in the 2d scene. The 2d set has the Philadelphia Brigade at the Angle and the Rebels at the Emmitsburg Rd. That should do it until next spring and the Wilderness.

Jim Heenehan

Trivia

What Federal general told his wife that Cincinnati furnished more goods to the C.S.A. than did Charleston?

William Tecumseh Sherman

Trivia

What Indian tribe was the first to declare its loyalty to the C.S.A.?

The Choctaws, who passed such a resolution on February 7, 1861

Schedule of Old Baldy CWRT Speakers and Activities for 2013

**September 12 – Thursday
Camp William Penn
Jim Paradis**

**October 10 – Thursday
New Jersey Civil War Surgeons
Valerie Josephson**

**October 19 – Saturday
G.A.R. Museum and Library Field Trip
4278 Griscom Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

**November 14 – Thursday
Civilians in the Civil War
Paula Gidjunis**

**December 12 – Thursday
Meade at Fredericksburg
Don Ernsberger**

**Questions to Kerry Bryan at 215-564-4654 or
kerrylll@verizon.net**

You're Welcome to Join Us!

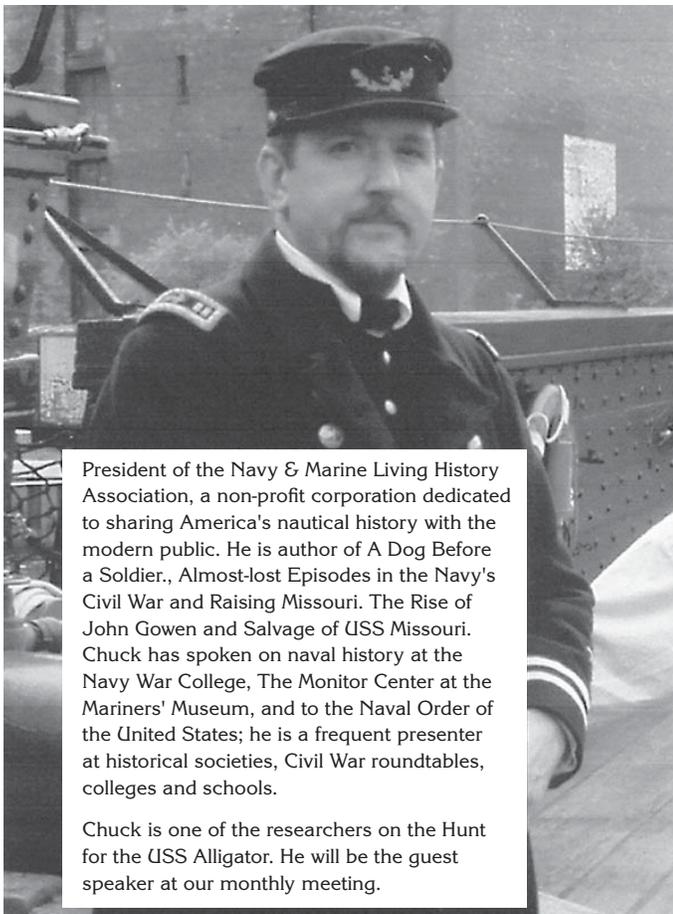
**Old Baldy Civil War Round Table of Philadelphia
Camden County College
Blackwood Campus - Connector Building
Room 101 Forum, Civic Hall, Atrium**

**856-427-4022 oldbaldycwrt@verizon.net
Founded January 1977**

**Annual Memberships
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President of the Navy & Marine Living History Association, a non-profit corporation dedicated to sharing America's nautical history with the modern public. He is author of *A Dog Before a Soldier.*, *Almost-lost Episodes in the Navy's Civil War* and *Raising Missouri. The Rise of John Gowen and Salvage of USS Missouri.* Chuck has spoken on naval history at the Navy War College, The Monitor Center at the Mariners' Museum, and to the Naval Order of the United States; he is a frequent presenter at historical societies, Civil War roundtables, colleges and schools.

Chuck is one of the researchers on the Hunt for the USS Alligator. He will be the guest speaker at our monthly meeting.

**Riverside Historical Society
Wednesday, September 18, 2013
American Legion Post 146 Hall
212 American Legion Drive
7:00 p.m.**