

THE RICHMOND NATIONAL PARKS QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

RICHMOND NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PARK
MAGGIE L. WALKER NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



The Superintendent's Letter

By Cynthia MacLeod

You will see in this edition of our newsletter that the theme is African-American history and contributions to our nation's culture. Of course, through the National Park Service stewardship of the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, we promote African-American history every day, not just the month of February. And, in our Civil War exhibits and on some of the battlefields, we highlight African-American contributions to our nation's history. To some, these contributions are part of the nation's previously hidden history; to others, they are part of a proud heritage unjustly ignored or denigrated by the country's mainstream. We cannot afford to be ignorant of each other's history or blind to the intertwining of all our histories, European, African, Hispanic, Asian, and so on. We cannot afford to misrepresent the traditionally famous as perfect icons, nor can we afford to assume that the unfamiliar is unimportant. I believe that education promotes understanding, and I fervently hope that we can all become more educated, more appreciative of history unfamiliar to us, and more understanding of those around us. If you cannot visit National Park System sites to explore their diversity in person, you can at least go to their websites at www.nps.gov for over 370 places in the system and there experience your America.

Black History Month Symposium

In celebration of Black History Month, the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, in cooperation with the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation hosted a symposium featuring four topics. The symposium illuminated the national theme, "Creating and Defining the African-American Community: Family, Church, Politics and Culture," and was moderated by Superintendent Cynthia MacLeod.

Dr. Edgar A. Toppin, Professor, Department of History and African-American Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University and Virginia State University offered a historical perspective on the African-American struggle for political empowerment. Dr. Audrey L. Brown, an Ethnographer in the Archeology and Ethnography Program, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. spoke on "Goin' Home, Goin' Home, I'm Just Goin' Home: Archeological Perspectives on African American Culture." Her talk identified what the archeological record shows about the housing, settlement and foodway patterns of African-Americans who formerly lived on sites excavated in New England, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, and concluded by discussing the socio-political importance of cultural history and reconstruction of the past through ethnohistory, ethnography and archeology. Rangers Monamma AL-Ghuiyy and Celia Suggs from Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site presented a talk on the African-American family. To finish, Reverend Arthur S. Jones, Pastor, Third Street Bethel A.M.E. Church spoke on the church in the Black community.

Interpretation Update: Archeological Success at Malvern Hill

Malvern Hill is the most completely preserved battlefield among the sites comprising Richmond National Battlefield Park. For several years now the park has worked hard to protect this fabulous resource while broadening the options available to visitors. Recent improvements such as new walking trails, interpretive signs and cannon all draw attention to key spots on the field. Restoring the landscape to its historic appearance is an ongoing project. Now, a fresh development stands to improve the experience of visitors to Malvern Hill still more. Within the past few weeks archeologists have found the remains of two prominent structures in the middle of the battlefield.

The series of events that led to the discovery began three years ago, when a series of photographs taken in the 1880's came to light. Nearly a dozen different views of the Malvern Hill battlefield included two long-range shots of the "slave cabins", a pair of wobbly-looking wooden buildings directly in front of the Union line atop Malvern Hill. Little specific information survives regarding those buildings, or even wartime activity on the farm, although it is believed the buildings were occupied by slaves in the 1860's. It was there, in the smoky twilight of July 1, 1862, that bold Confederate soldiers sought refuge, unable to advance the final few yards to the Federal cannon. "Dead bodies of our own men and those of the enemy were found in close proximity at and near these houses," reported General Semmes of the Confederate army.

Using the photographs and an 1860's map of the battlefield, park historians marked off a wooded section of the battlefield about 65 yards long and 30 yards wide, where they believed the cabins once stood. A work day brought together personnel from several divisions of the park to remove vines, brush and tiny trees at the site. That collaborative effort cleared the way for Dr. Bruce Bevan, a "geophysical surveyor." Dr. Bevan charted underground anomalies in the

target area by using ground-penetrating radar--a device not unlike a floor-waxing machine in appearance. His subsequent report showed several areas of unusual disturbance.

The week of February 5, a team of archeologists led by Joseph Balicki of John Milner Associates excavated ten spots within the zone, guided by Dr. Bevan's findings. Within minutes they exposed a brick foundation--probably either the corner of a piling foundation, or perhaps the base of a chimney--believed to be from the slave cabins. Further investigation at nearby spots revealed other 19th-century artifacts, including pottery fragments and military objects from the battle.

This project has been successful in every sense. It brought together historical research, energetic maintenance work, technological wizardry, and on-target archeology. The result is the discovery of a very important landmark in the battlefield's cultural landscape. After further research into the history of the buildings and their occupants, the park plans to erect interpretive signs telling the story of the site, and will provide access by building a very short spur from the main walking trail that now follows the path of some of the Confederate soldiers in their doomed charge up Malvern Hill.

Employee Profile: Kym Sigler

Kym Sigler is our new administrative officer, entering on duty on December 15, 2000. (As you can see, we've had quite a few new people coming to your Richmond parks lately.) As Richmond National Battlefield Park/ Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site's administrative officer, Kym "guides the park through the administrative maze of regulations, directives, policies and procedures in support of the park's mission."

Kym has over 24 years of experience with the government working with various agencies, including: Department of Energy, Western Area Power Administration; Department of Defense, Department of the Army (both civilian and military) and the U.S. Coast Guard; Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Geological Survey, and the National Park Service. Richmond National Battlefield Park is her second national park, her first being Great Basin National Park. Kym added, "I've held positions unique as a Construction Project Photographer through reaching one of my goals to be an Administrative Officer."

Kym says: "I always wanted to work for the Park Service because of the family working atmosphere that is displayed throughout the Park Service. I'm a grassroots type of person. I enjoy the natural resources and wonders of the national parks system. The Park Service has some of the most beautiful places to work and enjoy. When you have the beauty of the surroundings, add a great work life environment, then you have the perfect recipe for an awesome career." Kym's goal before she retires is to become the superintendent of a small park.

Kym was born in Albany, New York "with fireworks celebrating our nation's independence during the first year debut of the Ford Thunderbird convertible", and grew up in the south New Jersey area. Her family consists of her husband, Carl, and their Siberian husky, Tok. She added: "In my spare

time I enjoy painting, pen and ink drawing, various crafts, and traveling. When my husband is in Virginia we tour the country visiting the various parks throughout the area and surrounding states. Last year we visited 32 parks, mostly in the West and Southeast parts of the country. With every park I enjoy collecting their park pins and patches. As my husband and I 'Experience Our America' we are looking forward to adding the northeast to our experiences as we have enjoyed the beginnings of the 'cannon ball history' experience. Tok, our Siberian Husky, is the source of a lot of smiles and many happy memories. his ice blue eyes could melt anyone's heart."

Kym says she is looking forward to meeting the staffs at the various parks and also experiencing all the entire northeast region has to offer.

African American History Month 2001: A Memo from the Acting Director of the N.P.S.

The month of February has been designated as African American History Month, an observance that has been institutionalized and began as Negro History Week, through the tenacious efforts of Dr. Carter G. Woodson in 1926. This year's theme is "Creating and Defining the African American Community: Family, Church, Politics and Culture." This theme provides numerous opportunities to create and promote a better understanding and appreciation of the significant contributions of African Americans to this Nations and the world.

African Americans have made and continue to make important and historic contributions in countless documented and undocumented ways to improving the social, economic, cultural, political and religious life of this Nation. The history of African Americans is a story of extraordinary courage, tenacity, dedication and faith that prevailed against centuries of human bondage and discrimination to build lives for themselves and their families and strengthen the character of America.

The National Park Service celebrates the contributions of African Americans on a daily basis, through the preservation, maintenance and interpretative themes of more than 28 sites that tell the stories and legacy of their historical contributions and significance. Some of the sites that interpret African American History are Booker T. Washington National Monument in Virginia, Boston African American National Historic Site, Nicodemus National Historic Site in Kansas, Frederick Douglass National Historic Site in Washington, D.C., the Underground Railroad Historic Trail and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site in Georgia.

Our observances should be used to understand, appreciate, and acknowledge the ingenuity, creativity, cultural experiences of African Americans and their contributions. I am requesting that each of you join the National Park Service in observing African American History Month by participating in programs and observances in your area.

Web Sites Honoring the Achievements of African Americans

As Acting NPS Director Denis Galvin mentions in the memo on the last page, the National Park Service has more than 28 sites devoted to the achievements and struggles of African Americans in this country. Logging on to the National Park Service's nps.gov and typing in "African Americans" on its search engine produced a staggering 3510 results. The results range from short articles like that of Valley Forge's Diversity in the Continental Army to the extensive National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom site.

Included among those web sites are, of course, our two Richmond National Parks. The Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site's web page includes basic information on the park's physical site, including special events as they occur at the site, as well as a point of contact for more information. Clicking on the blue "In Depth" button will take virtual visitors to the site's expanded home page. This page contains pictures of Mrs. Walker throughout her life, a timeline of her life and accomplishments, a short biography and one of Mrs. Walker's most famous speeches. Return to the site for continued updates, including that of a children's site, expected to be in place by the end of the year.

Two years ago Richmond National Battlefield Park added to its expanded home page an extensive site on the African American troops who fought at the battle of New Market Heights in Henrico County, and the web site continues to draw accolades. "USCT Medal of Honor Recipients" details the story of 14 men of the United States Colored Troops who earned the Medal of Honor for valor during the September 29, 1864 engagement. Richmond National Battlefield Park recently received the following email from a relative of one of those brave soldiers:

As an ancestor of Robert Pinn, I thank you so much for posting information on his achievements (especially his portrait). I own all three of the medals Uncle Robert wears in the photo. Additionally, Pinn attended Oberlin College after the war and passed the Ohio Bar. Afterwards, he practiced law and aided Colored soldiers in obtaining veteran benefits, since many were uneducated and could not read. Again, thanks Frances!

Finally, the National Register of Historic Places has created a special feature for African American History Month. This site promotes "awareness of and appreciation for the historical accomplishments of African Americans". The site showcases National Register historic properties and publications and National Park units commemorating African American achievements and contributions of American history. Also listed are newly designated National Historic Landmarks, including those associated with the Underground Railroad and Public School Desegregation.

All of these sites, from small to large, contain a wealth of information for those wishing to do research for themselves or their children or grandchildren. Take time to visit them the next time you are online.

Tredegar Bookstore Expands Selection on African American Subjects

The Tredegar Shop and Bookstore has expanded its selection of books and videos dealing with black life before, during and after the Civil War. Operated by Eastern National, the store previously stocked a number of titles concerning the efforts and bravery of black soldiers, but now includes items relating to slavery and Reconstruction experiences as well. Thus, a broader expression of the war's impact on 19th-century life is available.

Two multi-volume oral history collections provide a vivid glimpse into former slaves' lives, by way of interviews transcribed during the Great Depression by the Federal Writers' Project. The books deal with a variety of issues, including plantation life, slave auctions, and hardships of the immediate post-war period. These series are sold by individual volume. Black Voices from Reconstruction, edited by John D. Smith, contains period writings of the newly free. John Hope Franklin's 1961 study, Reconstruction after the Civil War, also is available.

The store's shelves reflect the rising number of black military studies. Dudley Cornish's The Sable Arm and Noah Andre Trudeau's Like Men of War remain popular, alongside titles new to the store, such as Joseph Glathaar's Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers and Russell Duncan's Where Death and Glory Meet, a history of the famed 54th Massachusetts Infantry.

Videos available include the 1989 film, *Glory*, a documentary on black

Richmond-area Medal of Honor recipients entitled *The Forgotten Fourteen*, and the History Channel's *Underground Railroad*.

The Tredegar Shop and Bookstore is open daily, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. For more information on these or other titles, please call (804)771-2035.

Richmond Civil War Day Set for April 28, 2001

This year's Richmond Civil War Day will be held on April 28 at the Tredegar Iron Works. The event will begin at 10:00 am with a dress parade of Living History Interpreters and will run until 4 pm, ending with a formal closing ceremony and awards presentation. Demonstrations will be scheduled throughout the day. Between demonstrations, visitors may tour the camps, interact with Living History Interpreters, visit the Richmond Civil War Visitor Center, tour Tredegar Iron Works and enjoy a walk along the Canal. Musical events, book signings and children's programs will also be featured.

One of the continuing goals of Richmond Civil War Day is to increase awareness about Richmond's role in the Civil War and the war's role in American History. To that end there will be living history interpreters explaining and illustrating the roles of civilians and minority populations in Civil War Richmond, as well as those of the soldiers who fought around Richmond. It is hoped that the day will also increase understanding of the roles of Tredegar Iron Works, the Canal, the James River and the railroads in Richmond's Civil War history.

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