

Trans-Allegheny Dispatch

The newsletter of the West Virginia Reenactors Association
2021- March - Edition III

Upcoming Events

PLEASE NOTE that all of the events in 2021 are dependent on the status of the pandemic. Please ensure that the event is not cancelled before attending.

Civil War Sponsored

None at this time

Sanctioned

None at this time

Other Events recommended by WVRA members

Bentonsville - CANCELLED

160th Anniversary Bull Run, April 23-25

- Daniel Lady Farm, Gettysburg

Chancellorsville May 1-2, 2021 - NPS

Event - CANCELLED

New Market - CANCELLED

Stonewall Jackson Civil War

Roundtable, Second Tuesday of each month - PWA Building behind the Courthouse in Clarksburg

Gettysburg, July 1-3 - at the movie site in Gettysburg. - CANCELLED

Beverly Heritage/Rich Mountain, July 10. See below

Antietam, Sept 18-19 - Daniel Lady Farm, Gettysburg

Cedar Creek, Oct. 16-17 - Middletown, Va.

Other

Blue Gray Reunion, June 3-6, Philippi
White Sulfur Springs (Dry Creek)– August 21-22, Greenbrier State Forest [2021 Battle of Dry Creek | Battle of Dry Creek](#)

160th Anniversary of Ball's Bluff, Oct. 9-10 - near Leesburg, Va.

Droop Mountain – tentatively scheduled for Oct. 8-10. [2021 Battle of Dry Creek | Battle of Dry Creek](#)

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Other Time Periods

None at this time.

No Annual Meeting

No meeting is scheduled at this time. Because of concerns over Covid-19, the meeting is postponed until further notice. Any questions can be directed to the Executive Committee.

-- IMPORTANT NEWS --

Executive Committee Action

January

The following proposal was unanimously approved by the five voting member of the Executive Committee on January 21.

The Executive Committee authorizes and directs Secretary/Treasurer Jack Rush to renew the liability insurance. This includes paying for said insurance.

Keep in mind the Executive Committee action listed below from last fall.

(October)

The following two proposals were approved by the five voting members of the Executive Committee in an email vote the last week of October.

PROPOSAL #1 "In light of the current pandemic and its effects on the hobby, the Executive Committee postpones the election of new officers of the WVRA until such time that the Committee determines that it is prudent to hold the 'annual meeting' in accordance with procedures described in the by laws."

PROPOSAL #2 "The President shall have the authority to temporarily appoint, until the next duly conducted Association election, members to fill vacancies on the Executive Committee."

If any member has a concern or question about this action, please contact President Jim Barnes or myself. These actions were simply in response to how the pandemic is affecting group meetings at the moment. Executive committee members are listed near the end of every newsletter. Members are encouraged to work through your Unit Representative. If you currently do not have a Unit Rep., work through an officer. Reminder to General Members, the WVRA President serves as your Unit Representative.

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Emailing the Newsletter

I continue to encounter issues with emailed newsletters from other organizations. It appears that if the list of recipients is too large, the email is labeled as SPAM. And I believe our newsletter emails are experiencing the same. Therefore, I decided to experiment with smaller email lists, rather than sending emails to entire units within the WVRA.

Membership

I can report to you, that as of today, March 2, we have 39 members who have renewed. Last year we had 63 members. Keep in mind that you must be a member to be eligible for membership. And if there any questions about who is a member, refer to the list below.

It is past time to renew your membership in the WVRA for 2021. To be a member you must pay dues. To **be eligible for the group insurance you must be a member**. Return the membership form and dues to : C. L. Critchfield, 608 Skyview Drive, Clarksburg WV 26301

1. Dues are \$15 per year per person and \$25 per year for a family. If you wish to receive a paper copy of the newsletter there is an additional \$15 fee. The Email version of the newsletter is included in the membership. Family memberships are limited to family members college age or younger residing within the household.
2. **Minors:** All members under the age of 18 need the signature of a guardian to join. Those under 16 will not be allowed to carry a firearm. Those under 14 may not participate in reenactment battles. In addition the WVRA complies with the particular rules at specific events regarding age.

2021 Membership Renewals

Artillery

David Judy
Roger House

Susan Judy

1st West Virginia

Jim Barnes
Mike Phillips*
Chuck Critchfield
John Ziolkowski
Patrick Carroll
Bill Donegan

Keith Kopshina
Jack Rush
Kevin Skaggs
Chris Carroll
Ralph McCready

25th Virginia

Ken Connell
Dirk Behana

Tag Ireland*
Jim Allman

Tim Glaser
John Webb

Greg Watterson

TASAS

Peter Baxter*
Bill Snyder*
Pamela Dodds
Debbie Rush
Abby Ward
Linda Donegan

Phyllis Baxter*
Linda Barnes
Art Dodds
Patty Carroll
William Ward

General

Larry Teets
Matthew Price
Barry Miller

Senator Hunter Lesser
William Burruss
Rebecca Miller

Newsletter mailing

Bill Snyder

Tag Ireland

* - indicates lifetime members

If you think I have left your name off the list, please contact me.

Treasurer's Report

February 1 through February 28, 2021

Beginning balance	\$3,051.94
Credits	None
Debits	None
Ending Balance	\$3,051.94

Submitted by Jack Rush, Treasurer, WVRA

Upcoming Events

Rich Mountain Fun Run Memorial March

Join the Beverly Heritage Center for the 160th anniversary of the Union victory at the Battle of Rich Mountain! For July 10th, 2021, we are recruiting reenactors to help with programming, participating, and public education. The March will start on the Battlefield at the top of Rich Mountain and continue for 5.1 miles, ending in the historic town of Beverly. As visitors arrive at the Battlefield in the morning, our hope is that our participants will be able to interact with you. After all the runners/walkers make their way down the mountain, the finale of the

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event will feature Union troops marching into Beverly just like they did after the battle was won. We will have a space reserved for reenactors to camp if they are interested. Please contact us for further details at the Beverly Heritage Center by phone at (304) 637-7424 or via email at info@beverlyheritagecenter.org.

The Stonewall Jackson Civil War Roundtable

The SJCWRT has meetings scheduled for the second Tuesday of each month. The current scheduled location is the Progressive Womens' Association located directly behind the Harrison County Courthouse. The location is subject to change in later in 2021. Anyone attending is required to wear a mask. I have no word on the Morgantown round table.

Living History Monroe County

(Editor's note: I sent Chris an email asking for a contact address and whether he wants Civil War attire or 1901 attire about a month past. I have had no response at press time.)

Chris Johnson (former WVRA member) is planning a living history August 27 through 29, 2021 in Union, Monroe County to commemorate the 120th Anniversary of the Dedication of the Monument to Confederate Soldiers of Monroe County.

There will be an encampment Friday through Sunday, with a picnic social on Saturday. Circa 1901 attire. Veterans and families, dignitaries, locals - it was quite the spectacle in 1901. There were 10,000 people, parade, floats, etc.

Event Reviews

Other Features

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Botched

By Chuck Critchfield – based on eyewitness accounts

We hold our veterans in high esteem in this country. Primarily because of their service and sacrifice by joining the armed forces and

by protecting this country, the veteran deserves a special thank you. Especially combat veterans. And especially wounded and disabled veterans.

Some would say that our veterans are better class of people thanks to their terms in the armed forces. Some would disagree by saying that our veterans reflect American society and that you can find good citizens as well as bad, among the military veterans.

In my ongoing research of the 121st Ohio Volunteer Infantry, have been digging deeper into the men through Ancestry.com; Find A Grave and other sources. I am not sure I will research all 1200 men. But I am sampling Company A currently. And it is here I found private William S. Bergin.

In the winter of 1863-64 the 121st Ohio was in winter quarters at Rossville, Ga., just south of Chattanooga and just north of the Chickamauga battlefield. Worn down by 15 months of service and reduced in number, the regiment sent commissioned and non-commissioned officers to recruit the unit back to strength. The regiment was originally recruited in six Central Ohio counties. But for some reason the winter recruiting effort landed primarily in Knox County. And it was here that they found William S. Bergin – or as he was known to his acquaintances, “Will.”

He was living in Mt. Vernon, the county seat and in 1860 the census showed him living with a large group of people possibly in a hotel or boarding house.

Private Bergin signed up in March 1864. And according to the adjutant general’s report, he was 16. I was surprised to see that age listed for him as it did not meet minimum age requirements for rifle-carrying soldiers. Despite being a Knox County resident, he was placed in Company A composed of soldiers from nearby Union County. Will has badly wounded in the right arm during the Atlanta campaign and lost it to amputation. He was

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discharged in October because of that wound and after 7 months of soldiering was out of the military.

My research showed two more entries after that. The 1870 census shows him along with a large group of people again and then there is a notice of death in 1877. Dead at the age of about 30.

On June 15 of that same year, Bergin murdered Tom McBride the "keeper of the Bergin House." The Bergin House was apparently a hotel or similar establishment and I can only guess was owned by a relative of the former private.

Arrested and convicted, Will was sentenced to death. So began construction on a gallows between the Knox County Courthouse and the county jail for the one and only hanging Knox County would experience. Since the sheriff of Knox County had no experience with this type of execution, a Mr. Freeman, former sheriff of Montgomery County was called in to create the noose and tie the hanging knot.

On December 6, the curious began to arrive in Mt. Vernon. By the next day a large crowd of men, women and children had arrived by train, carriage, horseback or on foot. Many wandered over to the courthouse and jail in hopes of seeing something of interest, but the soldiers kept the throng from the jail and the hastily erected fence blocked their view of the gallows.

"But very few, if any, had the slightest hope of getting within the enclosure, and the best they could do would be to stare at the rough lumber which hid the gallows – that evidence of our Christian civilization(?) – from the view of the outside world. But little did it matter to the throng. It will not prevent them from rehearsing in future years to gaping listeners the startling story that they say Bergin hanged."

Bergin arose that morning, Dec. 7, had a large breakfast, met with clergy and was prepared, in his own words, to die. As noon grew nearer, he was escorted to the gallows by the sheriff, clergy and others. About 250 ticket holders inside the enclosure watched as the entourage ascended to the gallows. Bergin appeared to be the most cool and complacent man in the enclosure as he stepped up. His arms were secured and a hood placed upon his head, when a reporter noticed that the wedges had not been removed from beneath the trap door. With difficulty he alerted a minister on the platform and the wedges were removed. At 12:11, after determining that Bergin had nothing further to say to the crowd, Sheriff Gay stepped to the rear of the platform and sprung the trap door dropping the condemned man through the floor.

In an instant the body dropped all the way to the floor below.

"Such a thrill of horror as passed through that crowd shall never be forgotten." The two descriptions of what happened next vary. One describes Bergin left standing through the opening, with a large red mark upon his neck but otherwise in command of his senses." The other describes Bergin striking his head on a support and having to be helped to his feet. Blood had been drawn by the rope and Bergin was groggy.

The knot had failed.

Cries of "Great God!" and "Oh! Heaven!" came from the crowd," while one more bold than the rest exclaimed "There's the beauty of Christian gallows, for you!"

In either case Sheriff Gay sprung into action immediately. He jumped into the hole to comfort the condemned man who had just cheated death – or death had cheated him. In short order Bergin was back on the platform where the clergy came to his side to "console him as best they could." At some point whether beneath or on the platform

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Bergin reportedly said something like "this is worse than murder." But otherwise he continued to exhibit a calm and cool demeanor, "staring death in the face."

While Bergin was consoled, the horrified crowd in the enclosure and a handful of onlookers looking down from nearby church steeples watched as a second rope was hurriedly produced, a noose made and then tied to the crossbeam. And at 2:14, just three minutes after the first attempt, Bergin stepped upon the door once again. The second noose was placed around Bergin's neck. "Hurry Johnny; you are choking me a little," said the condemned man. "Go ahead; I can stand it."

Sherriff Gay once again stepped to the rear of the platform pulled the handle and sprung the door. The body fell with a dull thud. The rope held firm this time. The body twisted around on the end of the rope. His arms moved slightly. A man fainted in the crowd.

At one minute later, the doctor attending, examined the body. It still had a heartbeat. At two minutes the same. At three, four, five it continued to beat. It was 12:44 before all signs of life ceased. The sheriff prepared to cut the body down as a telegraph from Ohio's governor was handed to him. "Please telegraph me the time when the execution of Bergin takes place."

Sheriff Gay cut the body down and examined. Bergin's neck was not broken. Death was not instantaneous. Death had been by strangulation over a half hour.

The body was taken to Bergin's sister's residence. The gates were opened so the crowd could file in and see the gallows.

So ended the tale of one Civil War veteran, wounded and disabled by battle.

(Author's note: Much of this article is based upon a story in the Ohio State Journal of Dec.

8, 1877. I found another account of the hanging in three other papers – all identical. These articles were written at a time that executions were under extensive scrutiny. Botched executions like this were not that uncommon. I think the two articles were probably slanted a bit to emphasize the ghoulish and horrible nature of the proceedings. In one newspaper the Bergin story was followed by a story about the use of the guillotine. Which was a more efficient killer than the gallows according to the article. The Knox County Sheriff was John F. Gay, 33.)

A Tale of Albermarle

A new law allowing local governments to determine the fate of Confederate monuments went into effect July 1, 2020 in Virginia. Shortly thereafter, the County of Albemarle (Charlottesville) Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to remove the Confederate statue from the county courthouse. The Board offered the statue to the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation whose Board of Trustees voted unanimously to accept. It will be relocated to a battlefield as a Virginia monument and placed where soldiers from that state played an important part in that battle. Two cannons and stacks of cannonballs were also included in the arrangement.

From reports in the Winter 2020-2021 issue of **Shenandoah at War**.

2020

In the past year, 168 Confederate symbols were removed, renamed or moved in public spaces in the United States. All but one since the killing of George Floyd. Most of the changes took place in Virginia.

- The Smithsonian

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Lawyers in the Mid-19th Century

The leadership in America for the first several generations was composed, to an extraordinary degree, of lawyers. During the first 76 years the United States existed, from 1789 to 1865, there were 16 presidents – 12 of whom were lawyers. In contrast, during the most recent 78 years (1938-2010), the trend was almost completely reversed. There were 14 presidents during this period, only five of whom were lawyers.

Why is it that lawyers so dominated public and political life during the first third of American history? Some insight is offered in an excellent biography of lawyer-President Andrew Jackson:

The legal profession, in the 1780's as later, was to American society what the clergy and the military were to certain other countries and cultures: an avenue of advancement for those with talent and ambition but with neither wealth nor connections. Protestant America had no church hierarchy to speak of, precluding the priestly route to success and it had no standing army, making a military unappealing. Yet, every society requires means for the humble to get ahead, lest their frustrated ambitions destabilize the status quo. In America, the law long served that purpose.

This is from "Civil War Lawyers" by Arthur T. Downey. It was a very eye-opening book about the legal issues leading to, during and as a result of, the Civil War. A good read if you are interested in such subjects. It includes an interesting discussion of the formation of West Virginia from a legal and political perspective.

- Chuck Critchfield

"They Said It (or didn't)"

Quotes, misquotes and fabrications attributed to the famous, nearly famous, not famous and infamous.

"Don't believe everything you read on the Internet just because there's a photo with, a quote next to it."

-- Abraham Lincoln, February 31, 1866

*"In **your** hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in **mine**, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict, without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to 'preserve, protect and defend' it."*

- Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, March, 1861

"As soon...as the Northern States that prohibited African slavery within their limits had reached a number sufficient to give their representation a controlling voice in the Congress, a persistent and organized system of hostile measures against the rights of the owners of slaves in the Southern States was inaugurated and gradually extended. A continuous series of measures was devised and prosecuted for the purpose of rendering insecure the tenure of property in slaves...Senators and Representatives were sent to the common councils of the nation, whose chief title to this distinction consisted in the display of a spirit of ultra-fanaticism, and whose business was...to awaken the bitterest hatred against the citizens of sister States, by violent denunciation of their institutions; the transaction of public affairs was impeded by repeated efforts to usurp powers not delegated by the Constitution, for the purpose of impairing the security of property in slaves, and reducing these States which held slaves to a condition of inferiority."

- Jefferson Davis to the Confederate Congress, April 29, 1861. Excerpted by the book *The Causes of the Civil War* edited by Kenneth Stampp.

"...By 1860 slave property was worth at least two billion dollars (in 1860 dollars -editor), and the abolitionists who insisted that this property be outlawed were not especially helpful in showing how this could be done without collapsing the whole Southern economy. In a natural reaction to all of this, Southerners closed ranks. It became first unhealthy and then impossible for

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anyone in the South to argue for the end of slavery; instead, the institution was increasingly justified as a positive good. Partly from economic pressure and partly in response to the shrill outcries of men like Garrison, the South bound itself emotionally to the institution of slavery.”

- Bruce Catton

Other Sites

American Battlefield Trust - www.battlefields.org

Beverly Heritage Center -

www.beverlyheritagecenter.org

Mason Dixon Civil War Roundtable -

www.wvmasondixoncwr.org/

Link to Clarksburg History Museum -

<https://clarksburgmuseum.wixsite.com/history>

Battle of Gettysburg Podcast -

Addressing Gettysburg podcast -

Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation -

www.ShenandoahAtWar.org

Current WVRA Officers

Jim Barnes - President

Ken Connell - Vice President

Jack Rush - Secretary/Treasurer

Vacant - Unit Rep (TASAS)

Vacant - Unit Rep (1st W. Va. Infantry)

Bill Brisendine - Unit Rep (25th Virginia Infantry)

Dave Judy - Unit Rep (artillery)

Webmaster - Peter Baxter

Editor - Chuck Critchfield

Note - Webmaster and Editor are non-voting members of the Executive Committee.

ATTENTION - Please do not send any correspondence to the PO Box in Buckhannon. Membership information can be sent to me. Remember you must be a member of record to qualify for membership benefits. To be covered under the liability insurance policy purchased by the WVRA, you must be a `` The other group is labeled simply West Virginia Reenactors Association. Tonya Daft is the administrator on the West Virginia Reenactors Association page. Please address all questions to her about that page. I am not sure who is administrator to the WVRA-TASAS page. I continue to use the WVRA-TASAS page to post announcements as it has been the page getting the most use.

As newsletter editor, I encourage submissions from members or readers, that are related to American history. I retain the right as editor to make a final decision on the content of this publication. Abusive or political submissions will not be published.

Editor's Corner

The Editor's chance to speak

IT APPEARS that some of the pandemic restrictions are beginning to fade away and we may have reenactments this year. However, I detect little interest among the WVRA membership to participate. Membership is down by 1/3. Some long time members have dropped out.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE to create your own historical record, jot down your recollections of January 6, 2021 and keep it for future generations to read. I also invite you to submit for publication in this humble publication, any stories of your family military history or your favorite reenacting stories.

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March 2021
- Edition III**

This newsletter is available free to members by email. It will be mailed by US Mail for \$15 per year fee.

The views expressed here are not necessarily The views of the WVRA.

WVRA website - wvra.org

Chuck Critchfield - Editor

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ccritch608@yahoo.com

"We tend to create stories that appeal to us. Then we impose those stories on the past."

- A Wallace Collection video produced on the 500th anniversary of the battle of Agincourt -found on You Tube

"The lack of a sense of history is the damnation of the modern world."

- Robert Penn Warren