

THE STONEWALL

February 2000

BLACK SAILORS IN THE UNION NAVY

BY DR. JOSEPH P. REIDY, ASSOCIATE DEAN
HOWARD UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thousands of Black Americans served in the Union Navy during the Civil War. While recent years have seen much on the role of Black combat units such as the 54th Massachusetts, the role of black sailors, like that of most who served in the Navy, is largely neglected. Dr. Reidy's talk will be very informative for BRCWRT given the fact that we have had little or do discussion on either the role of Black Americans in the Civil War or the Navy itself. In addition to his duties as a professor and dean, Dr. Reidy also serves as a member of the Scholars Advisory Board for the George Tyler Moore Center for the Study of the Civil War at Shepherd College, near Harper's Ferry. He is also a member of Gettysburg College's Lincoln Prize Advisory Council.

Please support the preservation. Raffle. In addition to books, this month we are offering:

Freedom's Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War
Joseph Reidy, co. editor.

“Sid Meier's: Antietam,” on CD ROM the latest thing in
PC Civil-Wargaming

“Landscape Turned Red” (Antietam)
Stephen Sears

“O. O. Howard, Union General”
Gerald Weland

When: Thursday, February 10, 2000 7:30 PM
Where: Centreville Regional Library

Bull Run Civil War Roundtable

Field Trips Spring 2000

By Kevin Anastas

Saturday 11 March

1st and 2nd Kernstown (Sign-up this month)

Tour Sponsor: Gary Ecelbarger and Scott Patchan

Saturday 15 April

Gettysburg, 1st Day + Culps and Cemetery Hill

Tour Sponsor: Kevin Anastas

Saturday 29 April

Centreville/Union Mills and Orange & Alexandria RR

Tour Sponsor: John McAnaw

Saturday 20 May – Sunday 21 May

Petersburg: Summer '64 – Winter '65

Tour Sponsor: John McAnaw

Date TBD (In the fall)

Second Manassas

Tour Sponsor: Kevin Anastas

FY 2000 dues are due!

Please pay at the February meeting or mail them to:

BRCWRT

PO Box 196

Centreville, VA 20122

Individual - \$15.00 Family \$25.00

BRCWRT SPONSORS:

The American Military University

www.amunet.edu

(provides copying services for us)

Check out their Civil War Studies

FIRAXIS Games, Inc.

(410) 568-3675

www.firaxis.com

(donated the Antietam game)

Try out Gettysburg!

PRESENTATION OF COLORS TO THE 1ST SOUTH CAROLINA COLORED INFANTRY

(excerpt from: *The Complete Civil War Journal and Selected Letters of Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (regimental commander)
Edited by Christopher Looby, University of Chicago Press.

January 1. A happy New Year to civilized people—mere white folks. Our festival has come & gone with perfect success, and our good Gen. Saxton has been altogether satisfied. Last night the great fires were kept smoldering in the pits & the beeves were cooked more or less, chiefly more; it does not really take more than 4 hours, during which time they are stretched on great stakes made of small trees, and turned by main force at intervals. Even the night before I carried a small piece to supper in my fingers, from the first cooked, & there is really nothing which it is done. About ten these people began collecting, steamboats from up & down river, sent by Gen. Saxton to convey them, & from that time forth the road was crowded with riders & walkers—chiefly black women with gay handkerchiefs on their heads & a sprinkling of men.

Many white persons also, superintendents & teachers—two of the Wares & Edward Hall, a young minister whom Dr Rogers admires. Edward Hooper in Captain's uniform & Dr Rogers' pretty little Quadroon friend, Charlotte Forten, who is here as a teacher. But most of these superintendents do not interest me much & seem rather second rate & inefficient. My companies were marched to the neighborhood of the platform & collected sitting or standing, as they are at Sunday meeting; the band of the 8th Me regiment was here & they & the white ladies & dignitaries usurped the platform—the colored people from abroad filled up all the gaps, & a cordon of officers & cavalry visitors surrounded the circle. Overhead, The great live oak trees & they're trailing moss & beyond, a glimpse of the blue river.

The services begun at 11 ½—prayer by our chaplain—President's proclamation read by Dr W H Brisbane, a thing infinitely appropriate, a South Carolinian addressing South Carolinians—he was reared on this very soil, and emancipated his own slaves here, years ago. Then the colors were presented to me by Rev Mr. French, who received them in N.Y. for us, unknown to us & had that fact very conspicuously engraved on the standard—a fact which saves the need of saying anything more about the Revved Mr French. But whatever bad taste was left in the mouth by his remarks was quickly banished.

There followed an incident so simple, so touching, so utterly unexpected & startling that I can scarcely believe it when I recall it, though it gave the key note to the whole day. The very moment Mr French had ceased speaking & just as I took & waved the flag, which now for the first time meant anything to these poor people, there suddenly arose, close beside the platform, a strong but rather cracked & elderly male voice, into which two women's voices immediately blended, singing as if by an impulse that can no more be quenched than the morning note of the song sparrow—the hymn "My country 'tis of thee; Sweet land of Liberty."

People looked at each other & then at the stage to see whence came this interruption, not down in the bills firmly & irrepressibly the quavering voices sang on, verse after verse; others around them joined; some on the platform sung, but I motioned them to silence. I never saw anything so electric; it made all other words cheap, it seemed the choked voice of a race, at last unloosed; nothing could be more wonderfully unconscious; art could not have dreamed of a tribute to the day of jubilee that should be so affecting; believe it; & when I came to speak of it, after it was silent, tears were everywhere.

If you could have heard how quaint & innocent it was! Old Tiff & his children might have sung it; & close before me was a little slave boy, almost white, who seemed to belong to the party, & even he must join in. Just think of it; the first day they had ever had a country, the first flag they had ever seen which promised anything to their people,—& here while others stood in silence, waiting for my stupid words these simple souls burst out in their lay, as if they were squatting by their own hearths at home. When they stopped there was nothing to do for it but to speak, & I went on; but the life of the whole day was in those unknown people's song.

I spoke, receiving the flags & then gave them into the hands of two noble looking black men, as color guard, & they also spoke, very effectively, Prince Rivers & Robert Sutton. The regiment sang Marching along & Gen. Saxton spoke in his own simple & manly way, & then Mrs F D Gage spoke to the women very sensibly & a Judge somebody from Florida & then some gentlemen sang an ode & the regiment the John Brown song & then they seemed to have a very gay time; most of the visitors dispersed before dress parade, though the band staid to enliven us. In the evening we had letters & so ended one of the most enthusiastic & happy gatherings I ever saw. The day perfect & nothing but success.

PRESERVATION CORNER

John P. McAnaw

Update on the Stone House Intersection

The new date for the public meeting on VDOT's Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) regarding proposed construction vicinity the Stone House Intersection (U.S. Highway 28/Route 234) is **Thursday, 17 February 2000**, at the **Manassas National Battlefield Park (MNBFP) Visitor Center**. The event will last from **6:00 to 8:00 p.m.** The date was changed from 10 February at the request of Supervisor Wilbourn (Gainesville District). He could not make it on 10 February.

For the public meeting, VDOT representatives will man a series of stations explaining various aspects of its Draft Environmental Assessment. There will be no presentation to attendees by a member of the MNBFP staff.

On 31 January 2000, I spoke with MNBFP Superintendent Robert K. Sutton about a town hall style meeting to include an informational presentation given by a MNBFP staff member prior to the kick-off of VDOT's "station" style briefings. He stated that he would have been happy to give a presentation but unfortunately will be in Arizona on 17 February. He added that no other MNBFP staff member had a complete background knowledge on the Stone House Intersection issues. Therefore, the idea of an informational briefing and a town hall style meeting was dropped.

Back in 1988, the Williams Center Tract, comprising about 541 acres, was taken by legislative action by the U.S. congress and incorporated into the Manassas National Battlefield Park. This marked an historic victory for Civil War preservationists. This victory would not have been possible without the leadership, courage, and indefatigability of **ANNIE SNYDER**, now a lifetime member of the BRCWRT.

Regarding the 1998 legislation relative to the taking of the Williams Center Tract, it was clearly the sense of the Congress that plans be developed to re-route traffic on both the Sudley-Manassas Road (Route 234) and the Warrenton Turnpike (U.S. Highway 29) around the battlefield. To date, 12 years later, nothing meaningful has been done to comply with the wishes of Congress. The BRCWRT general membership, by unanimous vote, passed a resolution in 1997 to the effect that the historic Stone House Intersection should be left as is and that action be initiated by concerned agencies to re-route battlefield traffic on Route 234 and U.S.

re-route battlefield traffic on Route 234 and U.S. Highway 29 around the battlefield. That resolution still states our position. Further in 1988, Congress directed the Sec. of the Interior to cooperate with all concerned "to promote and achieve preservation of views from within the park."

On 17 February, VDOT representatives will brief attendees on a document entitled "Draft Environment Assessment - Route 29/234 Intersection Safety Improvements." This is the second iteration of the EA.

The first one was rejected by Superintendent Robert Sutton, MNBP. Before continuing, I ask you to carefully study the enclosed VDOT map on the Stone House Intersection and vicinity. The magnitude of the proposed road construction is much greater than alluded to in the original (and unsigned) Memorandum of Understanding or the signed Memorandum of Agreement.

Listed below are the proposed construction projects vicinity the Stone House Intersection:

1. Add a left turn lane to each leg of the intersection:

a. West leg would widen two lane road approximately 851' for a left turn lane.

b. South leg would widen two lane road approximately 611' for a left turn lane.

c. East leg would widen two lane road approximately 1108' for both a left turn lane at the intersection and a left turn into the proposed parking lot on the east side of the Stone House. (NOTE: Widening of east leg would be on south side of U.S. Highway 29, away from the Stone House. The existing parking lot on the west side of the Stone House will be eliminated and replaced, as stated above, by one on the east side).

d. North leg would widen two lane road approximately 561' for a left turn lane.

2. Shave two feet off a bump on the existing road north of intersection to improve driver visibility.

3. Replace and widen existing bridge over Young's Branch east of bridge of accommodate additional lanes.

4. Lengthen box culvert under Route 234 south of intersection to handle flow of Young's Branch and the widened road bed.

5. Construct a footbridge over Young's Branch east of intersection.
6. Install pedestrian crossing at the Stone House Intersection.
7. Install new traffic signals to regulate increased flow of traffic at the intersection.
8. Bury utility lines vicinity of the intersection underground. (NOTE: There is no money currently available for this project.) Some feel betrayed due to the fact they were told by VDOT officials that these lines would be buried.
9. Install drainage improvements at the intersection to reduce ponding and enhance surface run-off. Concrete curbs would be installed.
10. Reduce encroachment on MNBP land would by using 11' vice 12' wide lanes; 50' tapers vice 100' tapers on turn lanes; and other proposed space-saving actions concerning the road bed.

To accomplish these multi-million dollar projects, VDOT will need special use permits from the National Park Service (NPS) for about two acres of parkland. To quote cited Draft EA, "VDOT will cede to the NPS a portion of land within the existing right of way that is not needed to accommodate the proposed improvements."

The Draft EA states that "The purpose and need for this project is to enhance travel safety and efficiency through the intersection of U.S. Route 29 and Route 234." Critics of this document point out that there are many other intersections in Prince William County that have many more accidents. They add that much of the hype about safety obscures the primary purpose of the major construction projects at the intersection which is to significantly increase the throughput capacity of vehicles through the Stone House Intersection. They state that the drive for improvements of the intersection represents a power play by realtors, developers, and other special interests, backed by local and national politicians.

Opponents of the proposed construction for the Stone House Intersection point out that, if the proposed construction is actually completed, there will be virtually no chance that the sense of the U.S. Congress back in 1988 will ever be honored, i.e., to re-route Route 234 and U.S. Highway 29 around the MNBP.

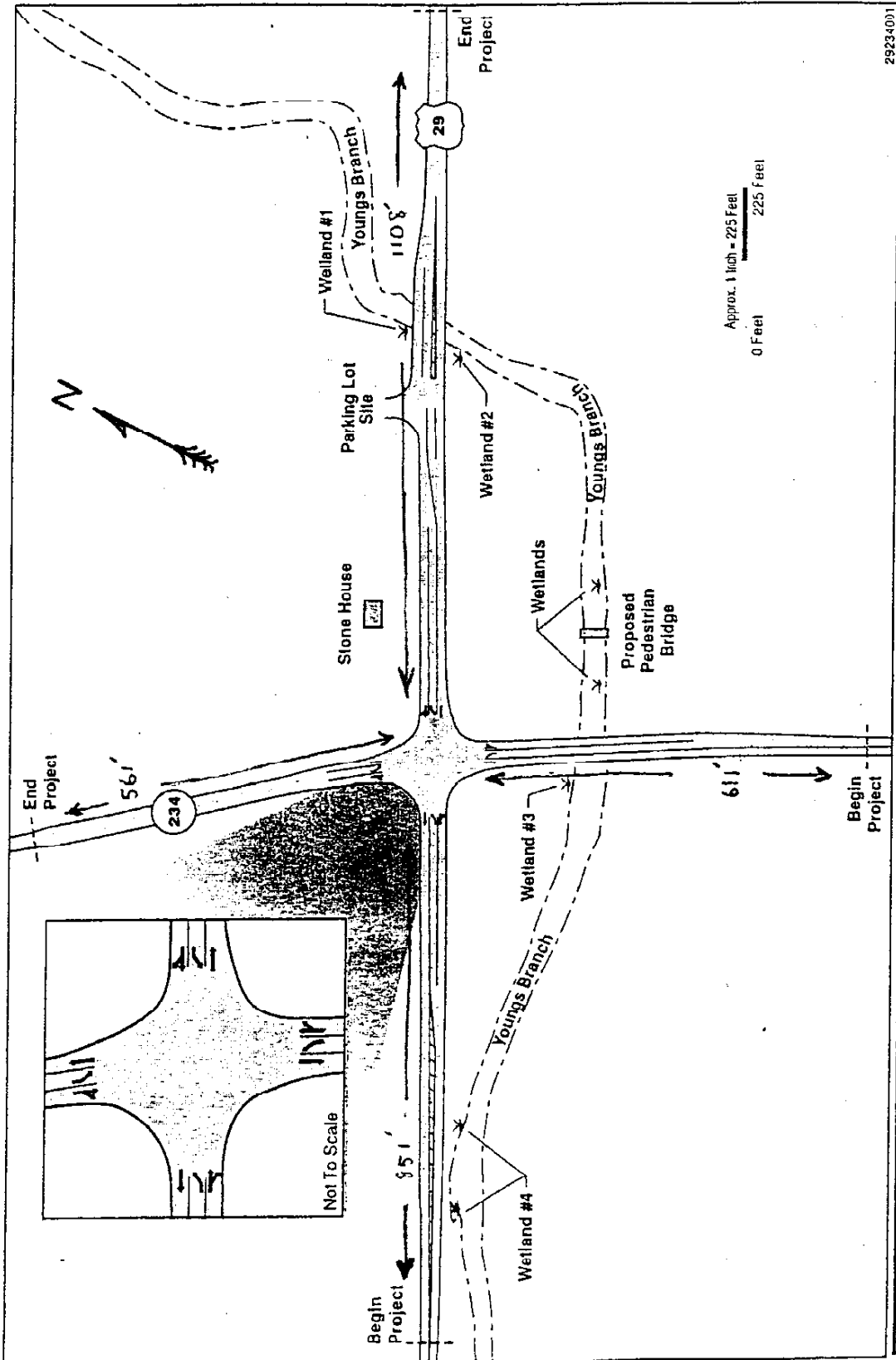
There is great concern within the historic preservation

community about the proposed plans of VDOT. There is no question that the historic viewshed, circa 1861-1862, would be adversely affected, if the proposed actions go through as planned, by the widened roads and the greatly increased vehicular traffic. The view from Henry House Hill, southwest of the Robinson House, Chinn Ridge, Dogan Ridge, and Buck Hill will, most certainly, be adversely affected. Some of the statements in the Draft EA go, as the Irish say "beyond beyond". Let me cite one on page 6: "The proposed action will provide for safer and more efficient travel on these two highways, including better Park access and circulation for visitors, while also protecting national and cultural resources, and enhancing the quality of the visitors' experience" (underlining mine). Whew! I might add that there is a significant noise level problem throughout much of the Park already. This will be exacerbated by an increased flow of vehicles through the Stone House Intersection.

I believe that there is a conscious effort by VDOT and other agencies to avoid input from the public on these proposed construction projects recommended vicinity the Stone House Intersection. Meetings were held by concerned agencies and we citizens were not informed of these occurrences. Now, many preservationists believe that now we are at the "Done Deal" stage of projected construction projects at the Stone House Intersection. I hope not. Make yourself count! Attend the VDOT "road show" on 17 February and make them listen to what you have to say!

The MNBP is our Park. It belongs to all Americans. The two major battles fought within its boundaries are part of our national heritage. The Park's future is not negotiable. The way politicians have misrepresented the facts is disgraceful. Particularly reprehensible were the strong arm tactics employed against the Park Superintendent who earnestly tried to preserve the historic setting of the Stone House Intersection.

A well-known Civil War preservationist in the Washington, D.C. area recently stated that "The Manassas Battlefield Park is ready to come apart." If, after forming your own opinion, you agree with that assessment, I encourage to write letters to various newspapers, periodicals, etc. and concerned politicians at the local, state, and national level. Time is rapidly running out.



PROPOSED VDOT CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS - STONE HOUSE INTERSECTION