

In Camp on the Rappahannock: BGES Investor's Report November 7, 2015

Hello I am Len Riedel, still Executive Director of the Blue and Gray Education Society. For those of you who are long time members, you may have begun to wonder and for those of you who have joined over the past 15 months and have heard nothing directly may also have begun to wonder—what in the heck is going on? Well I'll tell you. We have been mighty busy and I want to thank you for your patience.

In 2013 we agreed to develop, place and fund 71 interpretative signs to be placed at North Anna (13), Perryville (15) and Bermuda Hundred (43). We got each of those developed, printed, sponsored and installed. The final work having been completed at Bermuda Hundred this past spring. The work was timely and kudos posted in Blue and Gray Magazine's special edition on the campaign. We appreciated the "shout out" from Jason and Dave Roth. The signs at North Anna have just been recognized and photographed in another Blue and Gray Magazine article on the North Anna that has just been published this month. The Perryville signs replaced older signs that had deteriorated past the point of legibility. Knowing that they have just acquired additional land in cooperation with the Civil War Trust, BGES has volunteered to do additional signage whenever the management at Perryville is ready.

With the completion of this admittedly abnormal number of signs we have now fielded 116 signs at sites such as North Anna, South Mountain, Cedar Creek, Holly Springs, Bermuda Hundred and Perryville. We are interested and discussing how we might expand the interpretation of the battlefield at Raymond. Another site of much interest and potential is the previously private but soon to be opened Honey Hill Battlefield in SC. We do not have agreement yet but we are certainly open to that opportunity. We could also see some signage at Fort McNair to help tell the story of the trial and execution of the Lincoln Conspirators—more on that shortly.

We continue to do morale and assimilation tours for the Wounded Warriors of our wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Last week we had 30 soldiers and family members—more importantly we had some who have now been discharged returning to travel with us. The month before we had about 22 for our annual Antietam and Lunch for the Troops tour at Keedysville. The community is so supportive and the meals have become real displays of home cooking and Americana. Many thanks to them all—our clients from Walter Reed and Fort Belvoir include folks ranking from Private to Colonel.

For those of you who do not know how this works, about 8 times a year, I will schedule tours with pickups at both facilities. The dates are announced in January and approved by the powers that be at each base—we normally receive thank you notes from the commanding generals at each base. In cooperation with the Yellow Ribbon Fund—a first rate organization that arranges transportation, we get some volunteers to assist in anyway that is needed. We will order some reading books written by popular authors, set up lunch, snacks and then depart at 8:30 in the morning, doing our pick ups and then going to the battlefield for usually 4 or 5 hours. I will lead the tour with the focus on fellowship

and scholarship. We have a regular group of volunteers who help led by Vince DiMattina, Chuck Lee, Ben Buckley, Lee McDowell, Ray Griffin and Rob McDowell. I am gratified by the number of soldiers who attend multiple programs. We currently have a growing email list of soldiers and family members that now exceeds 80—it is a private club that respects their needs and privacy. It is a bond of brothers and sisters who have paid a significant price for their love of country. Recovering amputees, soldiers with embedded fragments of shrapnel, rods in their limbs and back, traumatic brain injuries and PTSD are our clients—for those of us respectfully of the sacrifices of soldiers in the Civil War this is as BGES President Jim Davis has said “The most important thing we do.”

We have mastered the delivery of this program and our actual cash needs are minimal. We have not collected money for several years. While the board has directed we look at perhaps opening this program at selected VA Hospitals to help those long term patients get some relief as well, we are not currently expecting to solicit funds for our use. That does not preclude projects that may arise. What I will encourage is that you send donations to the Yellow Ribbon Fund in Bethesda, Maryland letting them know you are a member of the BGES and that you appreciate their partnership. While we are not partnered with the Wounded Warrior Fund support there is also a great way to let our vets know you care.

We have also had a very successful couple of years running our Civil War Field University and our Weekend Warrior tours. I have been chastised for my time away from home and the office—you would think that after 21 years we would be running out of new programs but quite the contrary. With new and bright historians emerging there is a new level of interest and scholarship in the post sesquicentennial period. I develop robust schedules that average a program every 2 ½ to 3 weeks. Plug in 8 Wounded Warrior trips and some project meetings plus a few site surveys and my “away from home and office” time is approaching 3 ½ to 4 months a year. As you know that causes me to fall behind in renewals, recruiting, processing information requests and program development. As soon as I finish this update I start on the 2016 registration forms. But one thing at a time—lets finish with Civil War Field University and Weekend Warrior programs.

The tours we offer are designed as educational products with specific designed outcomes. The IRS recognizes them for their educational value and counts the revenue as part of our public support mission—unlike tour companies that repeat standardized tours time and again we press the envelope such as in our upcoming Gettysburg Terrain Study which explains how the geography of the region guided Lee and Meade in their strategic and tactical operations. Our 2016 schedule promises more of the same such as when we follow the same theme for the Siege of Vicksburg.

I’ve attached a worksheet and summary of our 2016 programs. Much of this has already been circulated on line and most programs have a lengthy list of interested people. The ones showing the most promise of larger crowds are the 140th Anniversary of the Little Big Horn with Yellowstone Park included; Our Route 66 tour from Chicago to Santa

Monica Pier (we are considering a return trip from Santa Monica back to Chicago; 75th Anniversary of America's entry into WWII, Gordon Rhea's 4 part study of the Overland Campaign is the most popular Civil War offering with Gary Ecelbarger's four year study of the Atlanta Campaign coming in second—Gordon's start has slipped to 2017 and is planned to run until 2020. Will Greene will start a multiyear study of the Petersburg Campaign in 2017. All of these look to be bus tours. The balance of our schedule is most likely going to be vans.

With so many new members it is useful to review our van protocol. We use vans to access sites where buses may not work well. With rental companies holding primarily 12 passenger but some 15 passenger vans we seat 9 people plus driver and historian in a 15 and 7 plus d&h in a 12. To avoid canceling undersubscribed programs we have even downsized to minivans. We use onboard mobile public address speakers and when multiple vans are involved we use walky talkie radios to allow all to enjoy the onboard narrative.

This year we have had two bus tours based upon the demand. We plan buses for certain programs with the ability to downsize if registration doesn't support the higher cost—as an example a 14 passenger bus with driver costs an average of \$950 per day; a 15 pax van \$200. Larger buses can run up to \$1800 per day inclusive of driver, meals, lodging and tip. Generally speaking we need 20 people to do a bus.

Our annual programs all have their adherents. A cohort likes the Weekend Warriors that start at 6 PM on Friday and end at 3:45 on Sunday—this works well for folks still working. Our Civil War Field University attracts retirees and the traveling crowd that prefers programs from 4 days to 14 days. Programs that do not feature the Civil War are primarily designed to tie into the period before the Civil War and immediately afterwards. Themes focus on lessons learned and leadership development. Overseas tours and multi-day tours like our Route 66 tour primarily appeal to those who like to do historical travel with spouses and friends and who have the means to do so. We use the opportunity to fold in as much Civil War and other history as we can. We are good at this and people trust us to deliver a good product. On longer tours we include reading books that enhance participant's understanding of the subjects covered. For all of these reasons the IRS view our programs as educational events covered by our educational tax exemption.

If you are interested in this aspect of our work then please fill out the attached worksheet and find the program that works for you. In 2015 we have seen our van tours filled to the optimum number and the bus tours comfortably loaded (sadly our Jefferson program suffered when the bus broke down and the vendor did not have a replacement forcing us, on a holiday weekend, to take what we could get.

With the completion of major projects in 2014 we had the opportunity in 2015 to focus on several strategic projects. Our fourth book with National Geographic Society is our most important. Scheduled for publication February 16, 2016, I am the editor of the 512 page **The Civil War, A Traveler's Guide**. This is part of the famous NGS Guidebook

series found wherever great books are sold. NGS keeps their guidebooks in print and this represents a significant upgrade over a smaller and shorter guide they published more than 20 years ago.

I would like to take a little time to brag on this book and encourage your wholesale support and advocacy. It represents the greatest opportunity BGES has ever had to grow to a larger organization. The NGS projects the sale of more than 50,000 copies in the first three years. The book has our name and logo on the covers, our name on the title page as the editor of the book, numerous essays that are credited to me and the organization and a page promoting the BGES near the rear.

The book has a number of attractive and personal features such as: 13 walking tours and two driving tours developed by BGES; a substantial International section inserted by BGES; informative sidebars suggested and inserted by BGES; more than 100 recommended readings from the BGES library; photographs shot by and credited to BGES members such as Bart Allen, Mike Green, Parker Hills and Chuck Lee. A painting of Burnside Bridge by BGES artist Jeff Fioravanti plus a generous number of full color pictures and maps. I edited every entry and page. The lists of the 25 most Critical Battles and Campaign listings are all our doing. This is in every way BGES' book.

The arrangement for this book is also unique. For the first time, BGES has become a full-fledged partner. We have a substantial financial investment in the book—approximately \$120,000 in cash donated by BGES members and fueled by a guarantee and challenge grant. We have raised right at \$100,000 and will need to raise about \$20,000 more in the next three months. Indeed we took this project on because one member guaranteed that they would redeem any shortfalls up to the full amount of our obligation (at the time \$107,000). I am proud to report that BGES members reduced their share to approximately a third of the total liability. That had dramatic ramifications for us as the donor being so impressed has guaranteed us additional “golden eggs” one of which came almost immediately.

In taking on this project, BGES' goal is to grow the organization. NGS' is to sell books; however, at the marketing meeting NGS affirmed our goal and vowed to work with us closely to grow the BGES in proportion to the sales. This will begin to manifest itself over the coming months and I will key you into those efforts.

The BGES also has a financial interest as your contribution and my involvement as editor guarantee us royalties of 12.5% of the wholesale price (averaging about \$1.50 per book) up to 25,000 copies and then 15% (about \$1.95 per book) for everything above that—if they sell 50,000 copies then we should see about \$75,000 returned to us plus hopefully thousands of new members paying dues. We also get to retail the book, wholesale the book and sell special leather bound editions. In this opportunity you can be a great help and I hope you will tackle this with the same enthusiasm with which you have made every other project successful. We can acquire trade editions of the book (what you see on the bookshelves of Barnes and Noble) for 65% off the retail price and sell them at the price we desire. We can also become a wholesaler to bookstores, historical societies and

travel businesses that Simon and Schuster (NGS') distributors do not service. We can wholesale to and at Civil War Round Table meetings and other businesses such as hotels that have gift shops and are in Civil War country. Collector's item leather copies of the book that we paid \$14 to print can be sold at \$50 each. Autographed copies also bring a premium. I will be appearing at NGS sponsored promotional events and around the country. Each of these opportunities will advance our goal of identifying prospective BGES members.

BGES gains the reputation of being affiliated with one of the world's premier nonprofit educational organizations. The use of our name and logo next to that of the NGS is a tribute to the integrity and performance of our mission. Recently Ruppert Murdock acquired over 70% of the NGS for more than \$1 billion—he too understands the value of a trademark. This is important because the areas that BGES has heretofore worked with will now be "For Profit." We have agreed in principal to as many as 4 more guide books in coming years; a meeting on our next one is scheduled for the week after next. Our guarantor is in place again for the next and if the dynamic fundraising continues for other projects beyond that.

I spoke about the immediate benefit of your support for the book. The Board of Directors approved the addition of a membership coordinator but without a funding source. The sponsor guaranteed funding for the position but even more importantly challenged us to eliminate all of our "long term debt" to free monthly payments for BGES business. Some of you may have supported the BGES' Independence Day Appeal. Let me review for you what happened there.

Having identified the person we wanted to hire, our sponsor sent us a gift of \$50,000 of which \$30,000 immediately paid off residual and long-term credit card debt that was taking 9.99% interest; we were then challenged to pay the remainder of our headquarters mortgage. BGES members responded to the challenge and powered past the goal in less than a month allowing us to retire the mortgage more than 2 years early. Overall, more than \$3,000 a month has been returned to our general fund. Way to go—indeed I have noticed that fundraising goals are met and exceeded in short order. I think that is a validation of the worthiness of the effort and a reflection of the values of the members of the organization.

So who got the job? Drum roll please.....Gloria Swift of Frederick Maryland. Many of you may know Gloria, she was the historian at Monocacy National Battlefield, the Curator of Fords Theater archives and historian for Fort Pulaski National Monument. She is a very noteworthy historian who took the NPS buy out and is now retired. I have seen many instances of her interactions with our members as both a tour leader, volunteer for the Yellow Ribbon tours and as a "firefighter" stepping in when I needed another driver at Appomattox. Her ease with the cohort and brother historian showed me she was an asset to anyone who employed her. After a field interview at Appomattox and interactions with the Board of Directors she was employed part time starting in September and as she assimilates into the system will be the primary agent for membership including growth, recovery and retention. Her stewardship will carry over to

being our social media person on Facebook, Twitter and other programs. She will also begin telling the BGES story on line and elsewhere. Work will include interfacing with sister organizations and heritage groups such as Round Tables. As she phases in she will begin to take on tour management and leadership in Wounded Warrior tours, weekend Warrior tours and Civil War Field University. I intend to let her plan about half the tours for 2017 and beyond with her also managing the conduct of them.

We have very high expectations and bountiful opportunities. Ben Buckley, a BGES member, directed our North Anna project, BGES member, Scott Williams and Doug Cumins had the lead at Bermuda Hundred. We completed, funded and printed some 26,000 brochures on the North Anna Campaign in cooperation with the Hanover County Sesquicentennial Commission. They are now being distributed from surrounding NPS sites and county tourism centers. Our board has directed we do brochures where needed for other sites where we have done interpretative work.

We have identified other project opportunities at Fort Gaines, The Magee House (site of the last Confederate surrender and the only original surrender building that remains), Fort McNair—site of the Lincoln Conspirator Trials and execution; Stratford Hall—Lee's ancestral home, Raymond, Perryville, Honey Hill, New Orleans and perhaps Franklin.

Let me tell you about the need at a few of them. In Fort Gaines, the Recreation Board and state provide no funding for this fully functional fort. In 1998, BGES did a preservation study noting the acute need for support—the site was and still is managed by a woman of extraordinary strength and vision—Melinda has now been there some 25 years. She runs the fort with the net proceeds that come through the gate in admissions and gift shop sales—some \$400,000 a year. She gets repairs and improvements done whenever she gets a large donation or an unexpected windfall of visitors. Much maintenance is done by she and her husband and some volunteers. It is remarkable. They need 6 windows to enclose all the buildings on site—she has over the years been able to get a number done but the remainder each is \$1700. This is a “must do” project totaling \$10,200. Another project will involve replacing oversized and improper cannon carriage mounts on the four display cannons on the ramparts. We do not have an estimate for them yet but they will permit the fort to assume a more historically accurate appearance. Incidentally, at the time of our visit I had a chance to visit with Mike Bailey at Fort Morgan. This sister fort is under state control and they were implementing some of our recommendations to stabilize the fort. He thanked us for our vision and support.

At Magee House, the Civil War Trust invested \$300,000 several years ago. The site was turned over to a friends group that was unable to make the museum work. They shut it down about 4 years ago and recently put the property up for sale. The asking price is \$275,000. The real value based upon surrounding real estate is about \$110,000. The house is the original house where ERS Canby and Richard Taylor agreed to the surrender of forces in Taylor's command based in Meridian. It is the ONLY EXTANT building in the USA where a war ending surrender took place. There is a caretaker building next to it. It is just in a lousy location and it has no commercial potential. We have some ideas but would be dependent upon some BGES member or reliable retiree who would want to

be the on site caretaker in exchange perhaps for free housing next to the building. Only time will tell.

Finally, Fort McNair is the site of the prison where the Lincoln conspirators were tried and executed and where John Wilkes Booth was temporarily buried. The fort is an active military base with restrictive entry; however, they have restored the courtroom where the trial took place and meticulous research has shown precisely where the gallows were, the final path of the condemned to the gallows, the spots where each dropped and the sites where they were temporarily interred. The courtroom is very impressive but needs the original floor covering that was used at the time of the trial. They also need an interpretative brochure and signs for the spot. The courtroom and area is open one weekend a month for civilian visitors. The site is of such undisputed significance that we think it needs to be fully documented and interpreted so it does not disappear in future base upgrades. We intend to offer our resources to get this done. It is a very high powered site with many senior officers in residence including service vice chiefs of staff and students at the top military war colleges in the world. Our friend, Dr. Mark Bradley works on the base at the US Army Military History Center.

BGES has developed a great reputation for getting things done right, on budget and on time. In the process we have completed many things that in the normal course of staffing might still be an unfunded plan. This seems to be the right place for us to occupy; but, what happens with the new book? That is the \$150,000+ question.

As a two person operation still in process of learning how to work together we cannot service a large growth; fortunately in the original business plan written in 1993 we considered this possibility and we would grow and most likely flesh out the Chatham office. We should hope to have this problem. What is most promising for us is the nature of the people, like you, that have participated so generously that we look like a much larger organization. Over 80% of our 375+ active donors give more than \$100 for basic membership—across the board the average is about \$160 per person per year. And then there are the projects: on the average our membership averages about \$175 per person a year in project donations—in this we do benefit from non active members who still track us and while not sending membership dues do support projects they are interested in. We have also developed a robust “on line” fundraising capacity—challenge grants and flash appeals have uniformly exceed goals of as much as \$10,000! An example was in the Independence Day Appeal where they donated about \$13,000 when the goal was but \$9,000. As the immortal Stonewall Jackson once observed “Who could not conquer with such men (and women) as these?”

Everyone can help and here is what you can expect. Gloria Swift will be writing to each of you introducing herself. I know so many of you and she knows some of you. As you know when I sent correspondence to you especially in asking for renewed membership support or project support I write personal notes. She is going to do the same but from a more impersonal position because you guys just don't know each other yet. The operative word is yet. Please don't think it forward it is how I have run BGES and I want her participating and interacting the same way. In time she will be as familiar to you as I

am to most of you. She also has her own email for us and phone number. All these need to be worked out and will over the coming months.

The NGS book is a big thing—consider this is the best promotion of BGES you could ever do. First make a list of people you could and would give the book, with a BGES membership form enclosed, for gifts. I can assure you this is a gift everyone who travels or is interested in history will be happy to receive. I do not know how many to a box yet—most likely 20. When we open this up please order and give the book to as many people as you are comfortable giving it to as gifts.

When you are asked think about where you could sell a case of books for us or where and who would be a valuable retailer of the book in your area. This is not time to be shy. If you are a supporter and everyone of you are this is the proverbial call to action that Thomas Paine made when talked about the Summer Soldier and those who would shrink from the service of their country. Ladies and gentlemen this is BGES' brightest moment—it is our coming out on an international scale. We need thousands of new members and will gain net sales and increased royalties from the sale of the book. I do not think we will reach the same level of sales as the NGS' book on National Parks which has sold over 1,000,000 copies in over 20 editions over the years; BUT, I do think that in a field where over 180,000 people subscribe to Civil War Times and battlefields like Gettysburg have more than 1,000,000 visitors a year that we could sell several hundred thousand of the books in the next 5 years or so. Preservation would be the winner.

My last encouragement to you is look at the label on the envelope. It has a date that represents your renewal. If it is earlier than 11/1/15 your dues are past due. We can fix that easily—call us at 434-250-9921 or mail in a check for at least \$75 (consider how far you are past due and consider prorating your donation to catch up for example if you are 11/1/13 you are three years past due meaning your last donation was November 2012—please consider at least \$225 to bring you up to 11/1/16. Larger donations will be extended to renewals of 1/1/17 regardless of the date you were due to renew. You would then hear again from Gloria in October 2016 asking for your renewal to 1/1/18.

These are exciting times. I hope you have found this informative and exciting. You are part of a great organization. I will endeavor not to be so long between updates; but, do maintain your support it means everything to us. I wish all of you wonderful holidays with much to be thankful for—Merry Christmas and God Bless America.

Len Riedel
Executive Director

