

In Camp on the Rappahannock

2017 BGES Investors Report

To the Donors of the Blue and Gray Education Society: Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to 2018, a year of promise and celebration—twenty five years as America's longest standing and now only national Civil War educational organization. I'm writing to give you a run down on our 2017 and to preview the coming year so grab a cup of coffee and lets get started.

After the sesquicentennial closed in 2015 many people wondered if the Civil War would die in the minds and hearts of Americans. I can tell you decisively not within the cohort that you form—donations for 2017 were higher than in previous years and with end of year gifts being tallied membership donations topped \$75,000 from a bit under 300 donors—a very generous outpouring of support. Thank you.

However, 2017 was troubling in many ways and by the summer it was clear that the need for organizations like the BGES would more important than ever before. We witnessed the unexpected demise of the legendary publication *Blue and Gray Magazine*. Dave and Jason Roth had been Civil Warriors since the mid eighties and suddenly and practically overnight they were gone! A great publication whose maps and General's Tours blazed a path for anyone who wanted to walk a battlefield. It is a real loss.

In another stunning change, *Civil War News*, published and edited by Kay Jorgenson announced it was suspending operations and was up for sale. Fortunately Jack Melton acquired it and moved operations to Charleston, SC. Initially Jack wanted to convert the mailing list to subscriptions to his fine magazine *The Artilleryman*, but the outcry from the public caused him to reconsider and the newspaper periodical remains in print but is certainly under careful scrutiny as to its continued viability. In the business world money talks and numbers do not lie. If you want something you have to pay for it. I wish Jack success and encourage you to subscribe—we do and it is a great source for the happenings in the Civil War community.

We continue to see a move away from interpretation in the National Park Service with increasing numbers of old and respected historians retiring without replacements. It is hard to believe places like Vicksburg, Antietam and Fort Sumter are not replacing Terry Winschel, Ted Alexander and Rick Hatcher. While there is no doubt that money is tight the downgrading of historian positions suggests that the caretakers are moving towards grass cutting and shifting interpretation to a back burner. Given the state of the national debt and the priorities of the new administration this is a trend that is not likely to reverse. What the future holds is hard to say but if we can have a military base closure commissions it is not beyond the pale that a similar commission might eventually be assembled to do the same to national parks.

Finally, 2017 saw a wholesale attack on the symbols and character of the Civil War generation. Social unrest, associated with the election of the president, spilled over into racial accusations and a general catharsis about slavery. The promising image of the President getting a tour at the First shot marker at Gettysburg was juxtaposed with his comments after Charlottesville, in which an attempt to show that there were troublemakers on both sides at that assembly, was extrapolated into a “White Supremacy” and white privilege strand of social commentary. Subsequent vandalism of monuments and arbitrary removal or masking of monuments in Austin, Dallas, Lexington Kentucky, Birmingham, New Orleans, Durham and in Maryland left us stunned and scrambling for firm ground. This was recently capped with the desecration of the burial site of the controversial, but unarguably brilliant, Nathan Bedford Forrest and his wife. Here the city of Memphis in defiance of state law sold the plot of land in its public park and the marvelous equestrian statue over the Forrest’s grave was removed to a warehouse. Yet he continues to inspire—being the culminating paper of a US Air Force Academy cadet’s degree program. We have put him in touch with 5 experts on various aspects of Forrest’s life—clearly the people of that generation still have things to teach us.

That there is a political component to this is indisputable. The newly elected governor of Virginia, a VMI graduate, ran on a promise to remove Confederate imagery from public venues leaving graduates of that venerated institution to wonder what would become of Stonewall Jackson and Moses Ezekiel’s famous Virginia Mourning her Dead. This comes on the wake of political slaughter of Confederate symbols such as battle flags which spread to all Confederate flags and the removal of heritage license plates from organizations such as the SCV. In Virginia we witnessed numerous political ads in which the candidate’s position on Confederate monuments was used as a club to label an opponent.

When BGES waded in on social media some of our members quit the organization taking the position that it was long past time to remove all symbols of disloyalty and to cease worshiping “traitors.” Does the war still live? My analysis of all this is that we are losing our heritage incrementally. The war on the monuments alarmed people and was subsequently redefined in the “Honoring traitors” channel. The talking points were that the monuments were erected in the midst of a social control

era (Jim Crow) in which celebrations of the monuments were really intended to intimidate the black community. This permitted the proponents of monument removal to restrict their arguments and exclude the slave owning Founding Fathers like Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Mason. At this point a bridge too far...but only AT THIS POINT (you may have observed that Jefferson, Andy Jackson and Columbus were also targeted).

The rhetoric has cooled but few are looking at what has been lost. Like in a game of football this is a war over field position and in the exchange of punts the people who would deny the past or rewrite it are starting their next series inside our fifty yard line. Our position is that you should measure twice and cut once. There is no denying that public grounds are and should be managed by public officials. There is a time and place to remove monuments but proper respect for the reasons the monuments were erected in the first instance should be aired and understood. Most of the monuments were erected at no small expense and by people who wished to commemorate the efforts of their parents and colleagues, most of whom were still alive, others were mail order generic tributes to the local soldiers who fought in the war. It is worth noting, just like various cemeteries, this took place in the north and south as well as internationally. The emotional elements of this are that descendants are being asked to justify the sacrifice of their ancestors. It is socially disruptive and demands constant repeated dialogue each time some politician seeks to curry favor by cherry picking the sound bite of the week.

I noted that real historians of either political persuasion have generally come out in opposition to this assault on Civil War imagery. BGES will stay interested and involved in this dialogue. My point is that the need for BGES and our members is greater than ever.

Is interest dying? I spoke in front of more than 400 guests at the Augusta Civil War Round Table in March 2017. People are still fascinated—my topic? Could the Confederacy have won the Civil War?

BGES had a good year in 2017—our recurring programs enjoyed renewed support. The Wounded Warrior program saw us going solo when the Yellow Ribbon Fund wanted to restrict the number of programs we could offer. Given that they were not providing any manpower support it seemed unnecessarily restrictive to our intent to tell us we could only offer four tours—instead we offered 7 and conducted 6—one being cancelled when we went up directly against a great offer from the Professional Golfer's Association (PGA). Still we worked directly with the bus company All About Town and our designated driver L C and averaged just under 20 participants per event. Our final at Gettysburg was the best attended of all and our annual community luncheon, teamed with Keedysville and the anniversary of the battle of Antietam, brought back alumni warriors and their families from across the country. It was a wonderful event.

We needed to replenish our funds to support the Wounded Warrior program and you responded immediately and generously raising over \$17,000. On average we spend about \$2000 per program—that includes lunch, lodging for me coming to DC, gas, books, bus, per diem and bus driver's tip. We also for the first time were able to accommodate two alumni of the Wounded Warrior program on Tom Clemens' and Scott Hartwig's South Mountain program—paying from the fund, their hotel and per diem, waiving the registration fee.

This program is extremely rewarding from both a personal and professional standpoint. Our clients are the same types of people whom we honor in study with the BGES. They come to us maimed and scarred, sometimes emotionally spent. We get to know them, befriend them and support their recovery. They are America's warriors and the people who care for them. They have already given but they do give back. A few years ago one warrior who had gone on more than five of our programs donated \$3,000. This year warriors donated over \$500 back to the program.

We have been invited to continue the program at Fort Belvoir which we of course will. I will look to schedule perhaps 7 more tours in 2018. More than 20% of the organization donates to this program. I am not sure I will need to do a general appeal for 2018 but you are welcome to donate at any time. Just send us a check noting it is for the BGES Wounded Warrior Fund. You will also be able to click the donate box on our new website.

Speaking of our new web site, we are well advanced on the design and are hopeful of putting it on line within the next few weeks. We expect it to be fully functional from the get go. We are upgrading our software packages to better respond to members and supporters. While some features will take a little longer to integrate, sites that interact such as Amazon's are fairly routine in the software universe and we expect that capability to make our site much more responsive to you.

BGES is finally seeing the long term benefits of our partnership with the National Geographic. Our new communications coordinator is Barbara Noe Kennedy. Barbara is a noted travel writer and former senior editor for Nat Geo travel books—she produced tour guides for London, Paris, Boston and is currently senior travel writer for Lonely Planet and Fodors with primary responsibility for Washington DC. Her work is regularly seen in *The Telegraph* of London, the *Washington Post*, *LA Times* and the *NY Times*. She is well respected and connected within the travel community. She has a strong interest in history—her mother having been held in captivity by the Japanese in the Philippines during WW II. Barbara is working for us 10 hours a week.

Another perk of the relationship is that our Junior Editor partner from 2003—Lisa Thomas has now been promoted to Publisher and Editorial Director of the National Geographic Adult Book Division. That position puts her in charge of all their publications—she was able to vector a bright young Nat Geo web designer to assist

us, as an approved free lance engagement, in the redesign of our site. Nicole Miller holds a masters degree in design and has come up with a crisp inclusive framework (think of her as an architect) that fits within the WordPress program we use for our design. I just reviewed the second draft and it is very close to final. Nicole is charging us half of the going rate for specialists in her field. She will remain on retainer to design add on pages for our site. Those modules will allow us to rapidly respond to on line opportunities.

For years, we have had an excellent code writer working with us. Al Stevens knows how to make programs talk to each other and how ecommerce and such things work. He has designed, under protest that he was not a content or design guy, all elements of the site. Now that we have engaged those specialists he is able to focus on what he does best which is engineer the software. It is a great team.

In late November, in conjunction with “Giving Tuesday” we quickly cobbled together a fundraiser that was conducted simultaneously on Facebook and through our email list. Our goal was \$10,000 to support the work on the website—we had more than 70 donors and we soared past \$12,000. This gave us the security of knowing we could pay the specialists, buy the new software and upgrade our internet platform to handle the newer features. You folks were amazing and the campaign was completed in two weeks time! Why was I not surprised?

A year ago I told you about some projects we expected to tackle. Well red tape gummed them up and it was not until the past three weeks that projects hopelessly mired in Red Tape finally cleared. I would like to tell you about a couple of them.

More than 20 years ago, the Medford Historical Society asked us for financial support to buy the software and computer necessary to catalogue and digitally scan more than 3200 photographs in the largest private Civil War Era collection in the country. Over the years we have worked with them on various iterations promoting the collection. Recently they completed the digitization of the collection and we are now in talks about using the collection as a research project. Many of the photographs are unlabeled and help is needed in identifying many of the images. It is a wonderful collection and I hope we will have a long standing opportunity to share these with you as we improve the documentation of the collection.

We had hoped our major project would be the restoration and interpretation of the courtroom and site where the Lincoln Conspirators were tried and executed. You have all seen the photograph of the execution. We know precisely where the gallows were and where each person was initially buried. Restoration of the courtroom and marking the grounds will take as much as \$50,000. In so much as the site is now an active duty US Army base the protocols are carefully controlled. In this instance a 3 star general in San Antonio, Texas must approve the acceptance of the gift from BGES. This of course cannot take place until the installation commander—also a general officer signs off on it. Because the installation is a Joint Base with Fort Meyers where the Joint Chiefs of Staff live it involves the Pentagon

and civilian secretaries. With a changed administration coordination was slow. We had despaired of this advancing when last month we got a comprehensive letter from the base that far advanced the project. So this is back on!

We will be responding to base inquiries later this month and pricing the various components of the gift. The issue of installation and expense for that will also arise. As you will appreciate the government cannot allow private non governmental organizations free reign to make changes on the base. Since the government must manage the site any gifts that improve it must be presented and accepted without a quid pro quo. This is our most sophisticated project but when done, will allow visitors to experience this unique and well known historical site on open weekends.

You will be hearing further from us on this project and will be asked to step up again to fund and support this follow on project. You may recall our first involvement with the Lincoln Assassination was the restoration of the flags adorning Lincoln's box at Ford's Theater. We really like this project and hope you will want to do your part to preserve this important part of our history.

We are probing other possible projects that may start this year. One is tied to the monuments controversy—we are pricing out that project and I will advise if we decide to tackle it. Another has to do with the Franklin Battlefield Restoration. I am talking with Eric Jacobson the CEO of the Battle of Franklin Trust and if we can agree the project will be presented to the Board of Directors. We are also looking at a possible monograph in line with our other 19 scholarly monographs. Rest assured that if we tackle them you will be read in immediately and you will get the chance to participate.

An aspect of BGES, that is often overlooked, is our Civil War Field University program. The tours, that we prepare, are considered by the IRS to be an integral portion of our educational exemption. The programs produce about 55% of our annual revenue. Our 2018 schedule is as good or better than any other years. In 2017, we executed the vast majority of our trips and found our registrations on the average up as much as 50%. Our Clemens and Hartwig program—part 1 of our 1862 Maryland Campaign series drew three vans. Our fall schedule was usually fully subscribed with anywhere from 13 to 19 registrations. As I said it was a very good year.

In 2018 you can find campaign series on Atlanta, Vicksburg, the 1864 Tennessee Campaign, the 1862 Maryland Campaign and the 1864 Overland Campaign. We are making our first trips to Eastern North Carolina and West Virginia. Jim Ogden will be doing his first ever tour of Perryville. We have a 25th Anniversary Commemorative program at Chester Virginia that celebrates our longevity. We will do a personality study of James Longstreet's Command audition in Tennessee. Scott Hartwig will take you on a detailed insider's walking tour of the second day at Gettysburg. We are doing the 100th Anniversary of America's WW I Doughboys and a commemorative tour of America's entry into WW II in the Pacific that includes

Bataan and Corregidor with the head of the War Studies Department at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. Gordon Rhea's first ever tour of his new book "On to Petersburg" has already drawn more than 20 registrants. I am doing Stoneman's 1865 NC Raid and Neil Mangum is doing The Pony Express and a back country tour of 400 Years of Virginia's History. Whew!

We are also working on the Ed Bearss Archives and as Ed turns 95 in June we are working inside connections in an effort to get him national recognition that he so richly deserves and which would provide a shot in the arm for the Civil War Education and Preservation movement.

BGES is planning for the future. A newly empaneled Board of Directors lead by Gary Wilson and shored up by Jo Roberts, Laurie Schiller, Bill McKinnon and Ken Ramsey will soon be joined by other notable and committed BGES members to plan for a life after my retirement which will no doubt take place somewhere in the next 4 or 5 years. I am very impressed with the way they have approached the challenge and believe they will take BGES into the next quarter century and beyond. All agree in view of the challenges I laid out in the beginning of this document this is critical.

Think about this—if BGES goes away what replaces it? Anything? What would inspire the creation of a new BGES type organization? Anything? Can we stand to let the American Civil War drop into obscurity? Have we reaped all the lessons the period can teach us? This is no casual issue.

We just finished the Civil War travel guide. Sales are now starting to move steadily ahead—over 10,000 sold and more no doubt will be on the royalty sheet soon. I see the book practically everywhere I look. In places like Barnes and Noble it is in the travel section—a noble partner for other Nat Geo travel guides.

BGES' other books: **Fields of Honor**, **Receding Tide** and **Shiloh 1862** all continue to do well with two of them now in paperback. All told we have more than 125,000 books in people's homes with BGES logos and a pitch for our mission.

This is a time for us to advance the significance of the Civil War era. You need to think about what the message is that you want and need to convey. We cannot let this be co-opted by the political movement. It is not and has never been about White Supremacy. The SCV and MOSB for any number of reasons let groups like the Klan co-opt the Confederate Battle flag. By not standing against the racist groups and with human rights they lost the war the day the punk in SC murdered the church members and his Facebook image showed the flag in the background. Long standing indifference emasculated the heritage group and the war is lost.

I raise this not to poke at our southern brethren. We have seen the opening volleys against Washington, Jefferson, Columbus and Andrew Jackson. The Southern monuments were the low hanging fruit. We dare not be casual or assuming that

northern monuments will remain either. Such an attitude could leave us in a generation with a multitude of empty parks and politically correct interpretations.

BGES board members met a week on retreat to discuss strategic planning and budgeting. Budgeting is important and completing projects as we have in the past—on time and budget is essential if we are to hold on to this pivotal era in our history. It was an intense couple of days from early morning to after dark—we did however manage to go to the Scottsdale CWRT meeting to see our friend Ed Bearss speak.

Well it is time to wrap this up. I wanted to convey to you the inside scoop on the organization you are supporting. Gloria and I are working with your representatives to make the BGES an even more visible and meaningful organization. What we do counts and that you are a student of this period makes the entire effort meaningful to the mission of “Revealing Our Past for Our Future.”

If you are past due in renewing? Please do. Our overhead is real. The Headquarters will need a new heating and air conditioning system in the next couple of years and at 138 years of age the building will need some carpentry repair and a new paint job. We may also need to do a bit more landscaping to make the campus the lovely and important location it is.

All this is possible because of you. Your donations cover the overhead of the organization. As much as I would like to do this for free, Mrs. Riedel insists I pay my share of the home bills. Thanks to you I do not have to get a real job and I get to walk battlefields with you more nearly 3 months out of every year. I hope to see many of you out and about this year.

If you have any questions please let me know.

If I can ask you for one favor this year—take your copy of the Civil War guide book out with you and a note book and tell me what has changed or what needs to be included or deleted. The challenge was getting the book into print—the second and more important challenge is to get it right and inclusive. Sales will fuel the motivation to do the second edition and that is where we make the book and guide everything it should be. Send those recommendations to me at BGES, PO Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531 or email them to me at blueandgrayeducation@yahoo.com.

I hope 2018 is superb for us all! I will be in touch again soon.

Sincerely yours

Len Riedel
Executive Director

