

In Camp on the Rappahannock

The Executive Director's Semiannual Membership Report

August 4, 2014

Wow, just back from a great study tour with Scott Patchan that covered Jubal Early's Shenandoah Summer—had a great cohort and a really memorable experience as we hosted our oldest client ever—Claire Rosenbaum, a spry 90 year old lady from New Jersey was accompanied by her daughter, Shelly. She took it all in and regaled us with stories of her recollections of World War II as we zipped through the back roads of West Virginia. It really was like having your mother or grandmother with you. They hope to join us again. It was a pleasure!

I am writing this to you in the midst of one of our busiest years ever. Frankly, more than one person can do effectively; however with some great support we are soldiering through. In two weeks, we welcome two new members to our board of directors: Captain Carl Tiska, who is the special warfare instructor at the US Naval War College and a Navy SEAL and Bert Dunkerly who is a National Park Service historian at Richmond NMP. They will be replacing Colonel Ben Buckley, US Army retired and Mr. David DuBose our longest continuous donor. Welcome Carl and Bert and thank you Ben and Dave. Other members of the board at the August Annual Meeting will be President Jim Davis; Joe Overstreet, Michael Chesson, and me. Joe is a retired investment banker from Cantor Fitzgerald in Tennessee. He joined us in April.

The August meeting will be the second meeting of the board this year. In June the board met in Richmond for a strategic planning session. The dialogue was spirited and the growth and sustainability of the BGES in the wake of the sesquicentennial was discussed. It was determined that the organization needed to hire a second full time employee who would be primarily responsible for membership growth and retention with other duties as assigned. The successful applicant will need to relocate to Chatham or the region and will be a self starter who thinks outside the box. We expect to advertise for the position in the later part of this year and hope to fill the spot by the Spring of 2015.

The board also discussed the sustainability of the BGES mission. We concluded that with over 100 interpretative signs sponsored and new opportunities such as Jericho Mill battlefield cropping up regularly that we would remain in the interpretation business that also includes site brochures and the maintenance of signs we had already deployed.

The board also recognized that scholarly publications and our relationship with the National Geographic is growing. I have met with the Director of Programs for National Geographic Expeditions (their travel arm) and we are exploring the possibility of working on history tours with them. I will discuss our current project with NGS later in this letter; however, for the purposes of strategic planning it is sufficient to say that additional books are forthcoming with the next three agreed in principal and the first of those already in contract negotiations.

The board also voted to explore entering the digitization of archival materials. Two immediate projects are the archives of Ed Bearss and the Medford Historical Society photographic collection. We have solicited bids to digitize Bearss Archives that are in 154 boxes residing on an active duty military base and putting them on line. The estimate is some 66,000 documents are in the collection. We are looking in to the viability of doing this project later this year and moving into the next phase that would be to pick apart the files for pearls of knowledge not previously shared with the public. This may involve employing someone to work in the archives with some specific tasks and deliverables. At Medford, this long-standing project has enduring interest to us as this magnificent collection of over 3,000 photographs has many that are still unidentified. We see a long-term project by bringing the photos into the public arena in hopes we can identify many of the people and or sites. The more people who see the pictures the more likely we are to identify them. We have been in discussions with Medford for some time and we will continue to pursue this.

While we have been looking at BGES and its future the present is full of activity and successes—some things are works in progress and others are completed projects. First let me say how proud I am of the BGES membership that has stepped forward aggressively to fund projects far faster than we thought possible. The response to funding requests has been awesome and generous. We tackle projects expecting funding in 3 months and they have been getting funded in 3 weeks—a slight exaggeration; but, we are certainly the envy of many groups who are amazed at our small core and its generosity. A surprising and useful dimension is our online appeals to push us past goals. Three different appeals have all netted more funds than were expected and twice we exceeded our funding objectives using online appeals.

I previously mentioned that we had funded over 100 signs (116 to be exact)—we have done 70 of them in less than 12 months: 42 for the Bermuda Hundred Campaign; 15 at Perryville and 13 at North Anna. As I write 5 of the North Anna signs are being installed today (August 4), the other 8 are being designed so that there will soon be 23 BGES interpretative signs at the Ox Ford Battlefield Park.

Speaking of the park, the new Blue Trail was dedicated on the 150th Anniversary of the battle in a wonderful ceremony—I had the honor of speaking at the dedication and was proud to see volunteer, Ben Buckley represent BGES by cutting the ribbon opening the park. I sat with Richmond National Battlefield Park Superintendent,

David Ruth who said what BGES was doing in the Richmond area was simply outstanding. His wife is the public relations director for Chesterfield County and he had heard of what we had done there from her. Gordon Rhea, who gave the keynote address, volunteered his time and expenses to help BGES raise funds for the park and led a BGES cohort of 23 people on a four day tour of the campaign. He also agreed to do a detailed study of the campaign for BGES starting with a 4 day tour of the Wilderness in 2016. We expect the other 8 signs to be installed before next spring. We will print a brochure for the North Anna portion of the campaign and deliver it for distribution to the NPS. We will also post the county's interpretive trail brochure on our web site.

What is in the future for North Anna? Well we buttonholed the state legislators and county commissioners at the dedication and promised them that we would provide a display artillery piece for the park if they would fund brown interstate markers for the park. They have started the political process to do that. We will tackle the gun next year. The recent announcement of the CWT's acquisition of the Jericho Mill battlefield led to a promise to be a participant in the interpretation of that site if it goes to the state or county.

Our work has not gone unnoticed as BGES will be receiving the Hanover County Historical Society's "**Patrick Henry Award**" for its generous support of the historical resources in the county. This takes place on September 16, 2014. There is a fee to attend, if you would like an invitation let me know. The net proceeds go to fund historical projects in the county. Jim Davis, Ben Buckley and Bert Dunkerly will attend and receive the award on your behalf.

At Bermuda Hundred, the signs have been paid for, delivered and are being installed by the county. The trail makes for a comprehensive study of this frequently overlooked campaign. They are already receiving kudos from heritage tourists who have stopped in. I am told that the signs should be completely installed by this fall. The county is considering a dedication ceremony that BGES will surely be invited to attend. I do not think it will take place before 2015. Incidentally let me say for the record, both the government's employees in Hanover Parks and Recreation and Chesterfield County have been responsive, hard working and a pleasure to work with. Indeed you should know that Scott Williams in Chesterfield County government not only designed the Chesterfield signs but he volunteered to design eight North Anna signs (in another county) on his time at no cost to the BGES—WOW!!!! I am proud he is a member of BGES.

At Perryville, we have paid for the replacement of 15 weathered signs and hope to see all installed by the end of the year. They have recently acquired additional property and we have asked them to contact us if they would like for us to assist in the interpretation of the new land. This is a fine battlefield that is well managed and maintained—if you haven't visited there you ought to.

I previously mentioned that we have contracted to do a fourth book with the National Geographic Society. Some of you may be aware of the excellent series of guidebooks that NGS puts out. They really put a lot of effort into them and they remain in print as the definitive work on the selected subject. Their guide book on the National Parks has sold over 1,000,000 copies and is in its 8th edition. I am very proud to share with you that they have decided to do a guidebook on the Sites of the American Civil War for publication in the spring of 2016. BGES has been invited to partner with NGS and I will be the historical consultant for the book. It will carry the NGS and BGES logo on the cover and on the inside.

BGES is also a funding partner for the book and as such will have shared marquee with the NGS and will collect royalties and other perks from the book. Our investment of \$110,000 has been guaranteed by one of our members and the BGES Board of Directors to a man has stepped up to the plate and guaranteed \$25,000 of the amount. I will be approaching you in the fall of 2014 to help us raise approximately \$36,000 over three years (2014, 2015 and 2016) to redeem our guarantor's challenge—he has already provided \$25,000 and expects to provide the net of whatever is left between the \$50,000 already pledged or paid and your donations/pledges later this year as we fund our \$110,000 portion.

I hope you can see what a tremendous honor this is and a unique opportunity to grow the organization. We expect to recoup our investment in actual dollars from royalties, direct sales of the book, new memberships and seminar tour registrants. As NGS partners, we are already reaping the benefits of increased access and exploration of areas of mutual interest in other departments of the NGS. This is just another feather in your cap. BGES means business and our reputation is sparkling. NGS doesn't need us; but, our value to them has been proven time and again with our reliable performance on the three books already done and the support and leads we have provided to them. They always viewed us as partners and now we officially are. I will keep you posted as more perks arise and are confirmed.

I will finish this report on our 4th book by asking you to consider what you can afford to contribute over a three-year period. Our guarantor is willing to engage in other BGES projects and will evaluate the level of his support based upon the leverage his challenges generate for the organization. On several occasions he has provided challenge grant money and as the stakes rise he is fully supportive of the means and opportunities to advance BGES to a new level. It is a true win-win proposition.

On Saturday, August 9th, we have 57 wounded warriors and family members signed up to do our Chancellorsville tour. This is our 5th tour in our 8th year of taking our heroes to battlefields—sometimes there are 4 people, sometimes 10 other times 20. What is important is that when they want to go, we are there. The program endures because the soldiers value time with us and we with them. We had surplus budget left over from last year's appeal; however, we will need to send out a 2014 appeal which may produce enough money to cover all the rest of 2014 and of 2015. We

have about 80 people supporting this program—if you do—please keep doing so and if you haven't yet please consider it. ***In this program BGES walks its talk! Warriors in 2014 are just like warriors in 1863.***

We are seeing many new faces in our tour programs that include *Civil War Field University* and *Weekend Warriors*. I have just posted the 2015 schedule on the web site. An information and interest worksheet is enclosed with this newsletter. Since we have added a number of new members since my last (December) update let me review the bidding for you.

We consider (and the IRS does as well) our Study tour programs as part of our educational outreach. This challenges us to not be a tour company but rather a group that pushes the envelope—we view that several ways and present the results in several formats. The ways in which we view this tasking is to seek new themes for visits to familiar battlefields. We assume most people know what happened at the major fields; what we want to deliver are new historians—the youngsters, and new perspectives. When a tour has traditionally been done in a shorter period of time we lengthen the time available. As an example we have taken Hood's 1864 Tennessee Campaign and examined it over 3 years and 3 tours totaling 10 days. In Vicksburg we did the campaign using Ed Bearss' trilogy and broke it into 9 tours over 5 years and 30 days. We are now doing the same with Atlanta, the 1862 Maryland Campaign, the 1863 Chickamauga Campaign and others. This permits a student the opportunity to digest and take the campaign slower while doing outside research. We have found the dialogue to be uplifting as people develop a detailed expertise on the campaign they are studying. At the same time we are searching for the historians who are making a name for them selves in this new period of discovery about the war. This is something we have always done.

Our Civil War Field University Programs are designed to take our best historians and challenge them to raise a program beyond the tour level to an educational experience. Our participants have come to expect that and BGES CWFU delivers consistently meaningful results. In addition we design the programs for small groups that will fit in one or two vans. Over a number of years we have found that vans give us a huge bang for our buck for a minimum of inconvenience or discomfort. Vans let us access places that buses won't fit and keep the cohort small enough to give everyone the chance to participate. Without groups of 30 or 40 we can quickly load and unload, our logistics are simplified as we can go to fast food restaurants instead of having catered sit down functions or box lunches—the food is fresher, you get what you want and the time off the field is minimized.

We are not driven by profit but by educational outcome. As a result our small cohorts are similar to the Oxford school of tutoring in which the student cohort of 4 or 5 meets with the professor in his office and the subjects are fully discussed with everyone participating. We rarely cancel programs because the events are priced to break even with five registrants in a van or 20 in a bus. We will go ahead with as

few as 4 people and if someone cancels we always provide a full cash refund with no questions asked.

Three years ago we realized that we were excluding many of our members who were either still working full time or who were not yet at the Civil War Field University level. Shamelessly copying a great model that David Ward at *Civil War Tours* follows, we set up programs in areas where he does not compete—basically everywhere other than Pennsylvania, Maryland and Northern Virginia. That left a lot of open turf to claim and we have done precisely that. Starting on Fridays at 6 PM our *Weekend Warrior* programs feature a known historian doing two lectures on Friday night followed by tours all day Saturday and Sunday. Starting at 8 or 8:30 AM and finishing on Saturday about 5 and on Sunday at 3:45 we make it possible for folks to come in after work Friday or just take Friday off and be on their way home by 4 PM on Sunday afternoon.

We have experienced mixed success with this concept usually presenting one van when we hoped to average 30 people on a bus. Last year we had 15 for Forts Henry and Donelson with Kendall Gott and Jim Vaughan; ironically in two weeks we will have our largest crowd to date about 30 for Jim Ogden at Chickamauga—it is our first bus in this series. The programs are priced for bus level registration and are a great way to spend a weekend.

We of course have other educational opportunities and in September I will be conducting a staff ride for 14 members of the National Geospatial Agency, a part of the US Intelligence network. ***This high level training develops critical thinking and leadership skills that will be used at the highest levels of government—real world and real applications.***

We will experience the end of an era in October. BGES friend and member Richard McMurry started leading tours for us 20 years ago—he is now 75 and this is his last year of leading tours. Richard is one of a decreasing number of the great trained historians—he did his doctoral work for the legendary Belle Wiley of Emory University. Richard is doing two *Weekend Warrior* tours for us this fall—one at Pensacola and Mobile and the other near Dalton covering the Atlanta Campaign through the Hell Hole. If you have never been with him before you should before he retires. If you had you should enjoy his company yet again and wish him well. Check things out on line or call me if you would like to go.

With all this as a lead in, we have announced our 2015 schedule and that is included. The dates are firm, as are the historians. Registration forms are going on line now and all should be up by early September. We have been fortunate in getting hotels to commit to room blocks and prices. So this last year of the sesquicentennial is ready to go! I hope you will join us for one or more programs.

The 2015 schedule has too many highlights to try and sell you on any of them—just take a look at the program summaries now and come back—I'll still be here.

Welcome back. I just want to say this about walking the battlefields. If you are interested in the war then you must know its sites. Even if you have been there before, I think you can learn much more by coming out with us. We think we give you the big picture—something you can impress on your brain to synthesize the impact of the war. We tie the loose ends together and critically ask the questions that ought to be asked. We start with an open mind on each question and then proceed to examine it as fresh evidence—it is amazing what you can glean from such a mental exercise.

I am now working on the schedule for 2016—many rising stars and recognized names will appear on the schedule. Each will be doing something they do not routinely do. Indeed my problem will be in trying to keep the schedule practical. There are so many exciting programs such as Keith Bohannon doing Kennesaw Mountain for the Weekend Warriors or Gordon Rhea starting a critical introspection of the Overland Campaign that will stretch 5 years, or Bud Hall tying the real tangible benefits of a lifetime of preservation to the fruits of his labor at Brandy Station and elsewhere. The retirement of key members of the National Park Service will free them for work with the BGES. Indeed so many great historians with superb and important vision and so few weekends to present tours.

Let me summarize this with the notation that the 150th Commemoration is merely the beginning of a whole new set of historians bringing new thinking, vigor and challenges into the discipline and on to the battlefields. We intend to be right at the forefront.

On April 24, 2014, BGES completed 20 years of service in the nonprofit community. It makes us one of the longest standing continuous preservation and educational organizations in the country. Our achievements are worthy and notable. Your continued support makes it all possible. Thank you.

I would now like to close this with a review and plea for feedback. Perhaps you are unaware of the mechanisms of information flow and feedback we have and are missing the real time information we are sharing with our members.

Several years ago, we went digital. Simply spoken the Internet took over. We have built an email base of nearly 2300 names. We have a bulk email system that gives us a closed loop on reaching people. We usually update our email list bimonthly. Our emails come in the form of either “Special Orders” or “Executive Proclamations.” Typically between 500 and 600 are opened. Not a bad reach. They also produce “click through” visits to our website. Usually no more than one or two people opt out of our emails. We average maybe 3 emails via this medium per month. That may go up to maybe 4 or 5 a month in the coming year. The feedback system is good. I know if you opened the email and I know what pages you visited as a result. That tells me if the email was effective in communicating. **If you are not receiving my**

emails and would like to get them please send me an email with the title: Add me. Send it to blueandgrayeducation@yahoo.com.

We have also gone modestly into social media—folks I am 60 years old and I am not wanting to be “friends” with everyone or link to the world. On the other hand, we have to use every way we can to reach our market and frankly you are it! In addition we believe that if your friends are also interested in history that this is an inexpensive way to help spread the word.

In banking you use dollars and coins, in social media like Facebook you use *Friends, shared postings and likes*. I have over 500 friends but nearly 90% are related to BGES business. We built a BGES page at www.facebook.com/blueandgray. That was intended to help migrate Civil War and history friends to that location but only about 25% of my “friends” have gotten there. What is wrong here? They are on Facebook and came via the Civil War and yet they don’t like BGES’ page? Come on man! If you are there please like us and follow our page—WHY?

Facebook is well suited for real time sharing of Civil War happenings and experiences. The media provides a platform for color photographs and other visual documentation to send a sense of what is going on. Here people can see our new signs as they develop and look at the neat places we are visiting and the folks who are with us. I can also share thoughts and information about Civil War topics and you can comment and provide feedback to me and others. ***It is not complicated and it is intended to give all BGES members and “Friends” a sense of the organization in hopes they will follow the happenings of our organization, share it with likeminded friends and perhaps elect to participate or donate to BGES.***

The feedback loop is twofold: **Likes and sharing**. If you see something we have done and it interested you then a “like” tells us that you saw it and are acknowledging it. You can also “share it” by clicking a button and making a comment to your friends about the entry. We have seen the multiplier affect at Perryville. A shared posting found nearly 500 people and had 20 likes; conversely I will post and post and rarely get more than 2 or 3 likes. I will also see that less than 100 people usually see the post. I know many are missed because of the dynamic nature of postings and the volume that is moving through hourly. Still if you visited the page the postings are there for your edification.

I am taking this time to share this with you because ***this free and dynamic source of information is not reaching its target audience and we are getting no encouragement to continue postings***. I have not made a new post in 6 weeks because there is no reason to do so. ***If the site were active for our members then it would encourage me to post daily***. However, as it is there are cobwebs rather than networking and that is a shame. I am not asking you to join Facebook for this; but, I am asking that if you are on Facebook that you consider liking and following the BGES page so that I know you are there. If you got into the habit of “liking” the

postings I would know by name that you are following what we are doing and your comments would help me know what you think or what else you would like to see.

Finally, Ecommerce is here at BGES. You can join, renew, make special donations, buy books, register for seminars and tours and add your name to our seminar lists for further information. Our site is fully and safely encrypted. We currently transact using PayPal but are working on an independent option for those who don't want to use PayPal. We also are bringing our credit card and debit card capabilities out of the 1990s and into the 21st century. We are working with BB&T, our bankers, to direct charge using our computers or IPAD. We will even be able to "swipe cards" when we are face to face. This will replace my carrying card numbers back to the office and staging for manual processing at some future time.

We also use an on line accounting system: Quick Books on line. They have become more customer-friendly and are moving towards a system that will let you pay the invoices I send you using your credit card on line. We are not there yet; however, the QB templates used to send invoices and receipts has changed. This allows us to approach you in a more personal, direct and yet **cost free** manner. I can now personalize the cover letter coming to you with an e receipt or e invoice—that allows me to do both the deposit or acknowledgment at the same time and without a stamp. If you need the receipt you now have it. ***This saves BGES' time and your money.*** Soon we will be able to ask for renewals and special donations using the Quick Books communications network.

Well I have exhausted my 8 page limit and need to close this (OK it is 9 pages Wil). I hope this candid conversation is both useful and educational. We are not fancy; but, we do get things done. I value your money and everyone's time. This is what I would tell you if we were face to face. Time is valuable and I don't spend a lot of time on the phone—members have expressed frustration that they cannot reach me. Fortunately 95% of our membership is on line and email works. I relish everyone and the 5% without Internet are just as valued—just more frustrated than most. I will try to do better. Our cell phone system is not the best but it is mobile and in a one person shop that is the trade off. It allows me to carry the office on the road.

I cannot say this enough, I relish each of you and what you have and continue to do with BGES. Thank you, you are awesome!

Sincerely yours

Len Riedel
Executive Director

