

A Transpiring History

“What is history but a fable agreed upon,” writes this issue’s contributor Dennis Frye in the first line of his latest book *Antietam Shadows: Mystery, Myth & Machination*. Author of 10 books and 101 articles, Dennis shares his insight into the Antietam battlefield with us (Pages 3-8). A native of the Harpers Ferry-Antietam area, Dennis is a pioneering battlefields preservation advocate. A founder of American Battlefield Trust, Dennis served the National Park Service at Harpers Ferry National Historic Park for over three decades. Dennis has received many honors for his work as historian and preservationist. Dennis invites Round Table members to see his presentation on Antietam this Thursday, June 11 at 7 p.m., live streamed on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/authorsreadingaloud>

America’s Bloodiest Battle

The President’s Corner: Famed historian Dennis Frye was to have spoken to us on June 9th about the Battle of Antietam. He will have an invitation to return and speak to us another time on this subject.

The Battle of Antietam, fought on Sept. 17, 1862, is one of the most interesting of the War to study for many reasons. It was the first field army level engagement in the Eastern Theater to take place on Union soil. An extraordinary twist, so to speak, was the Union discovery of Lee’s entire battle plan wrapped around three cigars that fell into General McClellan’s hands, which would have allowed him to defeat in detail the several elements of Lee’s Army, then separated. An 18-hour delay on McClellan’s part to act on this crucial information allowed Lee to consolidate his position on the West Bank of Antietam Creek, and prepare for the



Frederick Ray: ‘Stonewall’ Jackson, *Battle of Antietam*, 1963; featured as cover of *Civil War Times Illustrated*, June 1969. Ray was CWTI’s Art Director for many years.

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coming battle. McClellan's numerical advantage, some 87,000 men to Lee's 38,000, was squandered by McClellan's trademark caution and failure to concentrate his forces. Lee out generated his opponent on the field during the battle, and having fought the Army of the Potomac to a draw, was allowed by McClellan to escape south with his army to continue his campaign for another two and a half years. This failure resulted in McClellan's firing by Lincoln. And finally, it was the single bloodiest day in United States military history, with a combined tally of some 22,700 dead, wounded or missing. Many more died in the days that followed from wounds received. The sub-plots as this epic battle developed are too numerous to mention here. But again, as with our April speaker Bill Feis, we are most fortunate to have a written account by our planned speaker for *Battle Lines*. Dennis served for several decades with the National Park Service at Harper's Ferry National Park, for most of them as Chief Historian. "Stonewall" Jackson had captured Harper's Ferry just prior to the Battle of Antietam, which accounted for his late but nonetheless timely arrival on the field of Antietam, shown here on page one. Dennis and his wife have lived for some years in an ante-bellum farmhouse that figured prominently in the Antietam story...but I will let him tell that part of his story. He has written a first-hand and personal account of his investigation of period photographic images for us here...Thanks very much, Dennis, and we look forward to seeing you at the Atlanta Civil War Round Table in the future.

Finally, this is our last *Battle Lines* for this Campaign Year. Since we are not meeting again until the next, with a new President, Carlton Mullis, I want to thank you all for your support and the wonderful seven months we had before we were so rudely interrupted by Covid-19. It has been a distinct pleasure and honor to have served each of you and our Round Table during its 70th year, and I want to offer a very special thank you to Carol Willey for stepping in and editing this publication on short notice and then throughout the year. Until we meet again.....

John



*‘ Preserve your memories,
keep them well,
what you forget
you can never retell. ’*

“Still Photo:” Louisa May Alcott

Left: Alexander Gardner, Union
Burial Crews at Antietam.
(Library of Congress)

Images, Land Tell Antietam’s Unfolding Story

One of Antietam’s greatest mysteries surrounds a photo.

How can that be?

Nothing stirs memory more than a photo.

Photographs time-freeze a moment. A picture, literally, stops time. It captures an image—of an instant—in life. Photos enable us to relive a personal experience, whether it be a Christmas past with your favorite gift, or visits with grandparents, now perhaps passed. The selfie with friends allows us to remember ourselves in moments of social bonding or on a lifetime vacation experience.

What would we be—and where would we be—without photographs?

People who lived during the Civil War were the first generation of humans to live *with* photographs.

Prior to the advent of the first popularized form of photography (the “daguerreotype,” unveiled in France in 1839), few people knew what other people looked like outside of their small social circles. Only the wealthy could afford painted portraits; and with the exception of an occasional sketch, we could never know how distant people appeared.



Alexander Gardner: Confederate Dead Along the Hagerstown Turnpike (Library of Congress)

This explains why, if you're exploring genealogy, you cannot discover photographs of your ancestors. In my case, a photographic image beyond my great-great-great grandparents is impossible.

And now we transition . . .

"The Dead of Antietam" changed photography forever. The images became a national sensation. Dead men in the Bloody Lane; bloated bodies by the Burnside Bridge; corpses near The Cornfield; decomposing carcasses before the Dunker Church. Graphic gruesome and grotesque, people never before had seen war portrayed so realistically.

"The Dead of Antietam" offered me my first lesson in history—as detective work. About 115 years after the original New York City exhibition, while I was a sophomore at Shepherd College, historian William Frassanito resurrected the Antietam series. He published many photos in his novel and award-winning book *Antietam: The Photographic Legacy of America's Bloodiest Day*. But Bill did not simply reprint pictures. He used his talents as a former U.S. Army intelligence analyst, along with his passion for history and photography,

to determine *where the photos were taken on the battlefield*—documenting the location of each shot and then matching it with a modern-day view. Bill Frassanito transformed my impression of the Antietam landscape.

Nearly forty years have passed since Bill first taught me his investigative techniques. But Bill's innovations helped lead me to my own discoveries—and solving the mystery of a famous Antietam photo.

Let me explain.

I live on a farm south of the Antietam Battlefield, and about two miles south of Burnside Bridge. My home, in fact, served as General Burnside's headquarters in the weeks following the battle. My wife Sylvia and I lovingly and attentively have restored our home to its Civil War era appearance.

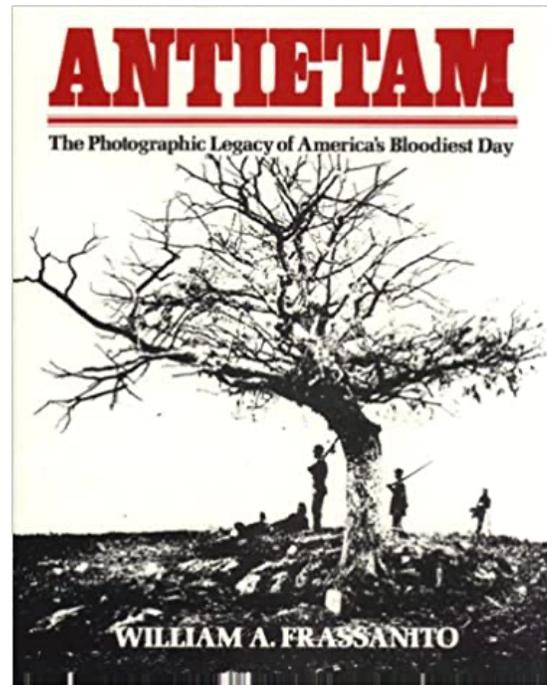
Two weeks following the battle, during the opening days of October, Abraham Lincoln arrived to congratulate his victorious army and to examine the Antietam Battlefield. En route he briefly visited with Burnside in our home, then proceeded to General McClellan's headquarters, where Lincoln and McClellan met to determine the future course of the war. None knew where this meeting occurred until recently.

Then I stumbled across something while researching in the National Archives.

I was examining a war claim for damages filed on behalf of the Civil War-era owner of my farm, Raleigh Showman. An amazing document, it described, down to the last fence rail, losses incurred as a result of the post-battle occupation of the house and farm by the Union Army. Absolute devastation was caused by unwillingly hosting 10,000 men in a mini-city for two weeks on the Showman farm.

But within the war claim, I discovered information not only about my farm, but also about Raleigh's parents' farm, called the Home Farm—a beautiful stone house located about three-quarters mile north of my place.

The claim specifically identified the Home Farm as the site of McClellan's post-Antietam headquarters. It also indicated that the U.S. Signal Corps had destroyed a segment of woods on mountain land associated with the Home Farm property.



These fortunate and unexpected discoveries led, in turn, to what I believe are the locations of several famous Civil War photographs—taken on the Home Farm during President Lincoln’s visit to Antietam. The photographer was Alexander Gardner.

One shows the president and General McClellan meeting inside his headquarters tent. This photo has been reproduced hundreds of times and viewed in television documentaries, magazines and countless books. But it’s an interior view only. How can we associate this with the Showman’s Home Farm?

An excellent clue is that the photo was taken at McClellan’s headquarters. We’ve established that location at the Home Farm.

But further proof is provided by an exterior view—but not from a famous photograph. Instead, it’s from an obscure image obtained by historian and writer Bob Zeller. In his excellent book, *Antietam in 3-D*, Bob and his co-authors present Antietam photographs in an entirely different way. In their book, published for the Civil War sesquicentennial (150th anniversary), the photos come vividly alive through 3-D glasses. This is no trick. Many of the original photos were designed to be viewed as three-dimensional images. The book even includes 3-D glasses to help the reader grasp the full breadth of these images.

One illustration reveals Lincoln and McClellan standing outside the headquarters tent, with landscape clearly visible in the background. Landscape background was a principal technique utilized by Frassanito—match something in the original photo with something on the modern landscape.



Lincoln at Antietam.
Above: Famous photo of the meeting of Lincoln and McClellan inside the tent; Right: Lincoln at Antietam with Allan Pinkerton left, General McClelland, right. (Alexander Gardner, Library of Congress)



I was able to do that. In the background of the exterior tent photo appeared a tiny structure. At first glance, it looked like a small tent aligned with other tents; but with careful and magnified inspection, it definitely stood out as a small structure.

When comparing the photo with today's landscape, the small structure is visible. It still stands today! It is the original stone springhouse for the Home Farm.

Speaking of landscape, other Gardner photographs taken at the same time featured people at headquarters other than Lincoln and McClellan. These photos further confirmed background landscape features.

One example is Showman's Knoll, or the rounded peak jutting up behind the stone house on the Home Farm, that appeared in other illustrations. The elevation and accessibility to Showman's Knoll made it an ideal location for McClellan's headquarters signal station from the end of September through the first week of October. You'll recall President Lincoln visited in early October, accompanied by photographer Gardner.

The famous Gardner signal station photo—featuring the distinctive log-crib architecture—usually has been identified as atop Red Hill or Elk Ridge. The Army did have signal posts at both locations, one at Red Hill during the Battle of Antietam, and another on Elk Ridge at Maryland Heights after the Federals reoccupied Harpers Ferry.

But those sites were not this station. Why would Gardner travel out of his way to those locations when he had a signal station within easy range immediately behind McClellan's headquarters?



At the McClellan camp with landscape in the background. The springhouse is between the tents beyond the tree: Alexander Gardner (Library of Congress).

Inspection today of the crest of Showman's Knoll reveals the original outline of the signal station—an entrenched square barely detectable within an 18th-century charcoal hearth (a flattened area where charcoal was produced as fuel for a nearby iron furnace). It also reveals the ruins of stone huts, laid out in company streets—the remains of the temporary homes of the signalmen. And as further evidence, while leading a tour for Antietam's licensed guides to this site, which is on private property, we literally kicked up from the ground a fully intact axe head that dated to the Civil War. We know, because we matched it up immediately by doing research on a smart phone.



Alexander Gardner: Union Signal Station (Library of Congress)

Photographs spur memories. But what happens if everyone who can remember where the photos were taken is dead? The location of the photos passes away as well.

These famous Antietam photos, taken at McClellan's headquarters, document a heralded past.

For the first time, we now can associate their locations with the present.

And all along, the locations were within sight of my home.

Atlanta Physician Survived ‘Two Revolutions’

Why Dr. Morgan Raiford failed to mention Atlanta’s most beloved Confederate physician in his 1955 talk (May 2020 *Battle Lines*) is a mystery that may be providential. This month seems more timely for remembering Dr. Pierre Paul Noel D’alvigny, survivor of revolution and civil war.



Dr. D’alvigny: Family Photo

Born in Paris in 1800, Dr. D’alvigny grew up in the Napoleonic era. Early in his career, he joined Napoleon’s forces as surgeon’s assistant. He saved a prominent life and thus won the French Legion of Honor. In 1832, Dr. D’alvigny survived the Paris riots. Questioned in court about his involvement, he testified he was only at the riots to help the wounded. Around this time, his home was raided. After this Dr. D’alvigny left France. In New York by 1835, he married Emiline de la Foy and then moved with his bride to Charleston about 1836. Dr. D’alvigny was hired as curator of the museum at the Atlanta Medical College, later Emory Medical School, around 1848 and moved to Atlanta.

Dr. D’alvigny, 60 when the war began, volunteered for the Confederacy. He served briefly as surgeon for the 9th Battery of the Georgia Artillery before failing health forced him to return to Atlanta. He then cared for a steady flood of military patients through the Siege of Atlanta. When Dr. D’alvigny learned that Sherman’s men intended to burn Atlanta Medical College, he used whiskey stores to intoxicate his helpers, dressed them as patients and put them in bed. When Union soldiers arrived, Dr. D’alvigny confronted them, shouting that he had lived through two revolutions, but had never seen anything as evil as soldiers intent on burning a hospital harboring the sick. When Sherman’s confused men replied that they thought the hospital was empty, Dr. D’alvigny showed them his “patients.” The physician was granted one day to move the sick. But Sherman moved his army out of Atlanta before the arson crew could return. The hospital remained. Dr. D’alvigny continued to work as a surgeon through the war, treating both Confederate and Union patients. After the war, he worked for the Freedman’s Bureau serving a black hospital. Margaret Mitchell used Dr. D’alvigny, who in her time was within Atlanta’s living memory, as her model for the character Dr. Mead in *Gone With the Wind*.

Thanks to Dr. D’alvigny’s fourth great-grandson Joseph McCullough for allowing us to use the information and photo from his fascinating genealogy and history blog: <http://whatcolorisbutternut.blogspot.com/p/dr-pierre-paul-noel-dalvigny.html>; and to David Floyd for calling our attention to this omission from our May article on Confederate Medicine.