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10-7-53

Richmond Times-Dispatch

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Several years ago Dr. Freeman learned of the flag and returned it to Virginia.

Dr. Freeman's Wish

In a speech here in 1950, he said that on his death he wanted the flag "brought here to the county of my mother . . ."

Elbert Cox, regional director of the National Park Service, presented the flag to the park service on behalf of Mrs. Freeman, who was unable to be present.

The Park Service was also presented with the original print of the du Pont Cavalcade of America film, "Sunset at Appomattox," which had its premier showing at a luncheon in Lynchburg today.





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A Banner Day in 1950

Memories are a precious source of strength and personal grounding for all of us. The large majority of childhood memories are of the intensely personal and emotional events that occur in the family, school, or church. But each of us probably has some early memories of events in broader community or national realms. I can remember the day World War II ended in Europe, because I knew my favorite uncle would soon be coming home. I recall the Dewey-Truman presidential election, mainly because it was such a surprise outcome and much talked about in the community and on the radio. I remember the first time I saw and heard a jet airplane fly overhead.

But one of my most cherished memories is of a sunny and warm Sunday afternoon, April 16, 1950, when I went to Appomattox Court House with my parents and paternal grandfather, John Lawson Brooks, Sr. The crowd of about 20,000 people was the largest gathering I had ever seen in my 9½ years. I recall standing very near the reconstructed McLean House which was being dedicated that day. The sight of the grandson of General Grant and the great-grandson of General Lee standing on the porch and preparing to cut the ribbon that would open the McLean House to the public was something truly grand and impressive! I also recognized that it was a special event because my grandfather wore his Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. His presence was impressive enough to let me know that this event was important history in the making; as a farmer, his only leisure time was Sunday afternoon, and he usually liked to spend it fishing.

The program started with a loud and stirring "Dixie" played by the Virginia Military Institute Band as it marched from the north to meet the Marine Corps Band marching from the south while playing the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." The bands met on each side of the McLean House. How thrilling the music, how shiny the instruments, how impeccable the uniforms, how precise the marching, how crisp and proud the orders! But I was troubled and asked my mother why the VMI Band was coming from the north. I knew the South defended itself against the North in "The War," and any loyal Southern band should be facing north, according to my understanding. She explained how General Lee had been moving south along the road to Lynchburg when the Army of Northern Virginia was blocked by General Grant's armies on the south, west, and east, thus making surrender necessary.

After the ribbon was cut, our attention turned across the road. I do not remember any of the specific words that were said that day, but I do recall the impressive array of important looking people on the platform. Along with Mr. Grant and Mr. Lee were Governor Battle, other local and state political figures, representatives of the National Park Service, Dr. Douglas Southall Freeman (a Lynchburg native), the President General of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and Mrs. Samuel West who was the President of Virginia Division, UDC, at that time. Mrs. West was a member of Kirkwood Otey Chapter number 10 in Lynchburg, the chapter which I would join 26 years later.

My attention was riveted by the tattered ANV infantry battle flag I saw on the platform. Its red looked faded, its stars were dirty, and many holes pierced its fabric. But to my eyes, it was a brilliant and glorious emblem of Southern spirit standing erect and proud between the US flag and Virginia flag. I learned later that it was the battle flag of the 61st Virginia Infantry Regiment, buried the night before the stacking of arms in April 1865. It was found and taken to Connecticut by a Union soldier. Dr. Freeman later bought the flag and, at his death, it was given to the NPS for display in the reconstructed courthouse. It can still be seen there, and its glory has not dimmed, its strength has not lessened. What powerful symbols our flags are!

As we left the area that day, my grandfather bought me a souvenir battle flag. The small printed scrap of fabric cost him a few cents, but it was and remains a treasure to me. It was the only gift my grandfather himself ever bought and gave to me. He was not a talkative man, but I knew that his feelings were deep when he gave me something special to remember the day by. His paternal grandfather, John James Brooks, a private in the 11th

Virginia Infantry, was born and raised fewer than 5 miles south of Appomattox Court House, and I shared that personal connection to the Confederacy with my grandfather. When I reached adulthood, I longed for an opportunity to discuss with my grandfather the Confederate veteran he knew as a boy. But April 16, 1950, was all I was to know of my grandfather's passion for the Confederacy.

This one day in April 1950 nurtured my dual interests in genealogy and history from which I have learned the answer to that perennial question asked of Americans with Confederate heritage: "Why does the memory of the 'Civil War' mean so much to you?" Our heritage is personal and lives in our hearts; what and whom we love, we can never forget.



AN ADDRESS BY
DOUGLAS SOUTHWALL FREEMAN

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of General Meade, and every man whom General Lee saw that day, save these two—I leave them nameless in their shame—were all that gentlemen should be in the hour of the defeat of a brother.

I need not tell the rest. You know what happened when he was across the stream and went through the ranks of those men who somehow sensed the fact that he had surrendered the Army. “General Lee,” they said, “are we surrendered?” Some said, “General, say the word and we’ll go after them again. General, we’ll fight ’em. General, let us loose and we’ll come back and fight ’em again.”

He rode on. How he kept tears from his eyes I know not. But he said, “Men, I have done the best for you I know how to do. You are free to go home and to stay there until you are paroled. Provisions will be supplied to you by the Federal Army.”

He went on, and the next day, as you know, General Grant summoned him and asked him if he could surrender all the armies; and Lee said no, he was Commanding General of the whole of the armies but his particular charge was the Army of Northern Virginia. He had surrendered that; he could do no more.

Then it was, you remember, that General Meade came to see him, and General Lee said, “Why Meade,”—he had known him and loved him in the old army—“Meade, you’ve gotten mighty gray.” And Meade made that gallant remark: “Yes,” said he, “I am gray and you are responsible for most of those gray hairs.” What a spirit, and what a spirit that day when they went to surrender!

I brought today with me one of the flags, one of a few flags, that that day was surrendered and carries now the marks of the bullets that passed through it. This flag was in the Seven Days, this flag flapped at Chancellorsville; this flag was on the ridge at Gettysburg; this flag went through all of the experiences and all the blood and slaughter of the Wilderness and of Spotsylvania Court House; this flag was at Reams Station; this flag—my father saw it—came up the hill when the Crater was recovered at the end of July in 1864; and this flag, with the tears of the men who bore it, was laid down on that red clay field half a mile up the road. It was saved and carried to Connecticut where I bought it. And I’d like today to say that when I die I’m going to have this flag brought here in the county of my mother, and I hope this flag always will be for all of you—look at it again, that southern cross—I hope for all of you it always will be a symbol of

that for which it stands, the reconciliation of gentlemen as gentlemen.

Said Lee, "I will go to see General Grant and will take the consequences of my acts." America could have no better exhortation than that same one, and that the words with which General Grant, when elected President, repeated to the nation what in spirit he so often had said here, "Let us have peace."

Appomattox need no longer represent strife and woe and humiliation. Eternally it may stand as an example of the reunion of brothers who never must permit the strife of class to take the place of the strife of States, or ever by anything we do or leave undone, keep this America of ours from being the dedicated shrine of that sacred peace.

DOUGLAS SOUTHALL FREEMAN



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