



# THE COTTAGE COURIER

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## From the Director...



Dear Friends,

While much of the focus on the 150th anniversary of the Civil War is about people, places, and events from 150 years ago, a few notable journalists and scholars have taken the opportunity to publicly reflect on how our nation recognized the last major anniversary of the Civil War — the Civil War Centennial. The Civil War Centennial Commission attempted to place an emphasis on stories that were considered unifying, such as soldiers' bravery, while avoiding topics deemed by some as contentious or inflammatory, namely slavery, emancipation, and equality.

But what of the formerly enslaved men and women who escaped to freedom, supported the Union effort, and sacrificed every bit as much as a soldier, some even becoming soldiers themselves? Are their stories not inextricably linked to those of bravery on the battlefield? Yes, they are. And we need to ensure that those stories are not only being told, as they have been for generations, but being heard and recognized on a national level during the Civil War Sesquicentennial.

On Monday, May 23, President Lincoln's Cottage was honored to host the first ever Contraband Heritage Summit organized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The summit was held on the 150th anniversary of three men, Frank Baker, Shepard Mallory and James Townsend, escaping to freedom at Fort Monroe. "Contraband," a fraught term, was how the Union Army classified the men, as a means of refusing to return the free men to their former owners aiding the Confederacy. The summit brought together preservationists, descendants, scholars, and other stakeholders to craft a vision for the preservation and interpretation of sites related to Contraband history. The story is absolutely germane to Lincoln's time at the Soldiers' Home. The Lincolns not only interacted with "Contrabands" at camps along the ride to and from the Soldiers' Home, but they also took an active interest in their plight by donating to Elizabeth Keckley's Contraband Relief Association. It is plausible to think these interactions influenced the president's policy toward slavery and emancipation.

One critical part of Civil War history notably absent from the commemorations 50 years ago was our very own President Lincoln's Cottage at the Soldiers' Home. Dramatic changes have taken place at the Cottage since the 1960s: the transformation from a dormitory and office space to a National Historic Landmark, then a National Monument and, finally, a restored, operating National Trust Historic Site. And the Home has seen dramatic changes too, having fully desegregated services for the veterans in 1963, 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation called for recruitment of black soldiers. To learn more, please be sure to read our feature article, "Centennial Change," by staff member Zachary Klitzman.

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TOP: Participants of the Contraband Heritage Summit at the Cottage on May 23. ABOVE: Breakout groups brainstorm vision, draft principles, and actionable recommendations for the preservation and interpretation of Contraband Heritage sites.

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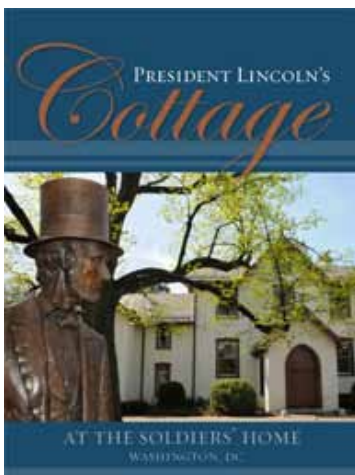
# VOICES OF THE CIVIL WAR

*presented by the Washington Revels*



President Lincoln's Cottage hosted the Heritage Voices of the Washington Revels in this special spring event. A visit from President Abraham Lincoln highlighted this program of American folk songs, spirituals, patriotic music, and readings. This program was free of charge and was held in the rain location - Stanley Chapel, adjacent to the Cottage. Watch the video [here](#).

## New Photo History Book



This newly printed book tells a brief history of President Lincoln's Cottage and features beautiful photos, both historical and contemporary, of the Cottage.

This book includes rare and previously unpublished photos of Lincoln's beloved home.

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## "First Visit" Ornament

The first in the series of Christmas ornaments created for the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War, this ornament commemorates Lincoln's first ride to the Cottage in 1861.



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or contact the Events Department, at (202) 829-0436 ext. 31232 or [plc\\_events@nthp.org](mailto:plc_events@nthp.org)



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President Lincoln's Cottage.*



# Centennial Change

by Zachary Klitzman

In April of 1958, Karl S. Betts, Executive Director of the one-year old Civil War Centennial Commission, gave an interview stressing what the upcoming centennial celebration would not be.

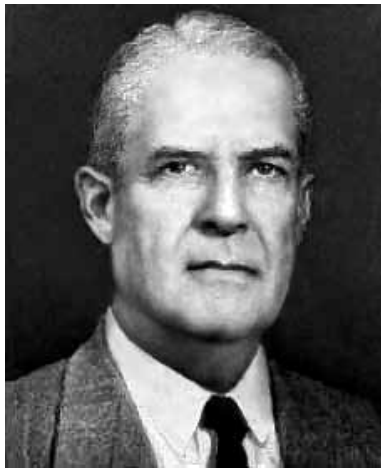
“We’re not going to fight the war over again,” Betts told *The Washington Post*. “We’re going to study it.”<sup>1</sup>

Betts’ opening statement was telling. The country was in the midst of the Civil Rights movement that would engulf the nation for the next 10-plus years. The previous September the “Little Rock Nine” had been barred from entering the Arkansas capital’s Central High School by Arkansas National Guard troops opposing the school’s desegregation. Thus, in the late 1950s and then early in the 1960s, the prospect of conducting the Centennial celebration within the charged racial climate of the Civil Rights Movement presented a serious possibility of fueling sectional hostility.

The last thing the Civil War Centennial Commission wanted was to increase the hostility between black and white, North and South, and integrationists and segregationists. Therefore, throughout the planning stages of the Centennial, the Commission’s different leaders echoed Betts’ point that the Centennial was not about refighting the war. Instead, their goal was to use the anniversary to commemorate a unifying moment in our nation’s history. However, the atmosphere of social change within the Civil Rights movement prevented such a naïve interpretation from being the only national narrative of the Centennial.

*We have no desire to create ill will*

Sen. John W. Bricker (R-Ohio) first proposed the idea of a national Civil War Centennial Commission in early 1957, over four years before the Centennial would begin. President Eisenhower appointed ten members to the commission, including Betts, in December of 1957 and the following August the House authorized an \$800,000 spending program, limiting the Commission’s spending for



U.S. Grant III  
Courtesy of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion



Thurgood Marshall  
Courtesy of Library of Congress

any one year to \$100,000. The all-white Commission included military personnel, professors, CEOs, attorneys and, notably, one woman, Mrs. Counselo Northrop, who in 1953 had become the first female speaker of the Vermont House of Representatives.<sup>2</sup>

All of these leaders strongly supported honoring the war as one that ultimately reunited rather than divided the nation. At a meeting of the Commission and DC Civil War Round Table in 1958, historian and Commission member Bruce Catton told the assembled crowd that the greatest aspect of the Civil War was that it did, and still does, unify the nation. The conflict “unites us by the

sharing of a great and mystical experience,” he told the 275-member audience. It remains “always on our conscience, just below the surface” and has led Americans “a great distance along the road to maturity and wisdom.” In the end, the war was “the terrible price paid by all of us for our progression from a small Nation to a great one.”<sup>3</sup>

The first Chairman of the Civil War Centennial Commission certainly knew the price paid by participants of the conflict. Ulysses S. Grant III, grandson of the Civil War general and 18th U.S. President was a Major General himself and saw combat in both World War I and World War II. Selected as the Commission’s first Chairman in 1957, Grant saw the Centennial as an

opportunity to bring the country together. Speaking as both national and state celebrations were in the middle of the planning stages in February 1959, he hoped “to arouse national pride, rather than stir regional animosities” and that “our efforts will have a good effect on the country. We have no desire to create ill will.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition to defining the national vision for the commemoration, Grant was attempting to respond to

plans from individual state commissions that he felt were divisive. “I am much disturbed by the knowledge that people think of the centennial as only a giant refighting of the war,” he said, referring to state Centennial commissions. “This isn’t the case at all. Some states may have such a thing in mind and the National Commission will not tell them they can’t go through with it. But we hope that a series of dignified observances will form the background of the centennial.” Grant ended by reiterating Catton’s point about the unifying factor of the war: “We also recognize that the war has served to draw us closer together rather than to tear us apart.”<sup>5</sup> Though the Civil War

undoubtedly reconnected the country geographically and to some degree socially, some scholars today argue that a portion of Union and Confederate veterans retained intense sectional hatred well into the 1880's.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the Chairman did not equivocate in his belief that the war united the nation.

Ironically, some of the same state commissions that Grant was concerned about were themselves worried that the National Commission would dictate the terms of the Centennials' interpretation. In addition to the National Civil War Centennial Commission, most states, especially the ones that existed during the war, created their own state commission. In turn, the 11 states of the former Confederacy created the Confederate States Centennial Conference to coordinate a Southern version of the Centennial. The irony of creating a separate Confederate Conference despite calls for "unity" was apparently not recognized by the Conference. At a meeting of the Conference, the delegates, including Southern politicians and some Confederate descendants, made clear their feelings that the National Commission should not be used as a platform for contemporary political viewpoints. "We believe it would be a mistake for the National Civil War Centennial Commission to engage in any activity, or to promote in any way any program that could, or would, be considered by any section of our nation as propaganda for any cause that would tend to offend the people of any section of our nation, whether North or South, and to reopen the wounds of war. We are therefore of the opinion that the National Commission should strictly confine its activities and programs to such as tend to further the real purpose of this Centennial Commemoration."<sup>7</sup> Their comments came in response to national plans to mark the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation with an event at the Lincoln Memorial.

What was the "real purpose" of the Centennial Commemoration? The Confederate States Centennial

Conference described a Centennial that would make Americans feel proud and patriotic about their Civil War relatives, rather than ashamed that some had fought to defend a slave society. At the National Governors' Conference in May 1958, Virginia Governor J. Lindsay Almond Jr., a segregationist Democrat, embraced the Centennial with the hopes that Americans would "work more cordially together to keep America American, and to resist the so specious and plausible efforts of its enemies, whether avowed or hidden, to subvert the basic tenets and principles of our Constitution and the institutions we inherited from those great men of 1861 to 1865."<sup>8</sup> Though those "enemies" certainly applied to the Cold War rivals of the East, the implicit "hidden" enemies were Civil Rights activists who would link the struggle for greater freedom and equality during the Civil War to their movement.

### *Irony of a most bitter sort*

Vowing to not refight the War through the Centennial interpretation was one thing. Suppressing interpretation of specific groups' perspectives was another. As the actual anniversaries and celebrations started to occur, keeping to this non-offensive plan was easier said than done, in part because refusing to acknowledge certain key elements of the war was, to many, offensive. The Civil War was, by its very nature, a divisive event, so commemorating every year leading up to the end was bound to result in events that pitted groups against one another. As the Civil Rights Movement itself evolved and became even stronger in the early 1960s, protests to make the celebrations more inclusive became louder. Protestors demanded that the national ceremonies include African American speakers and discuss the issues of slavery and emancipation directly. As Albert N. Brooks, a leader of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History said in March 1961 "We realize that most of the celebrations are slanted to favor the Confederate side," and "present a general program of

appeasement. ... It's something to glorify the South."<sup>9</sup> The National Commission's so-called "appeasement" to the Confederate Conference and the Southern Commissions paralleled the federal appeasements to Southern states in the lead up to the Civil War. The moves to suppress discussion of slavery and emancipation in the Centennial also mirrored the sometimes violent suppression of open discussion on slavery and emancipation leading up to the Civil War.

The first major flashpoint occurred literally at the start of the Centennial observances. Just like the recent Sesquicentennial kickoff, the Centennial started in Charleston, South Carolina on the anniversary of the attack on Fort Sumter. However, the hotel where the opening Assembly was to take place had a strict policy of segregation. About a month before the April 12 anniversary, a member of the New Jersey State Civil War Centennial Commission was notified that she would not be able to stay at the hotel nor attend the festivities planned there because she was African American. The New Jersey delegation instantly called for a boycott unless the venue was changed. New Jersey Senator Clifford Case agreed with the boycott, saying that "The Civil War was fought to vindicate ... the freedom and the dignity of the individual among people everywhere. To subject Negro members of the Assembly to the indignity of segregation and unequal treatment in connection with the commemoration of that great struggle would be irony of a most bitter sort."<sup>10</sup>

Grant's fear of a refighting of the war looked inevitable. In a desperate attempt to placate the matter, Grant said in a statement that the plans could not be changed so last minute. Furthermore, "We have no jurisdiction over what Charleston does, nor over the New Jersey State Commission and what they do."<sup>11</sup> President John F. Kennedy disagreed. Deciding to intervene before the blowup completely overshadowed the event, President Kennedy wrote Grant a public

letter in which he said that since the Commission was an official body of the federal government it had an “obligation” to make sure its invitees were accorded equal treatment.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the meeting was moved to the desegregated federal naval base in Charleston.

The country responded with mixed feelings towards Kennedy’s intervention. *The Washington Post* wrote an editorial, “An American Centennial,” that praised Kennedy’s position as “admirable [in] simplicity and firmness.” “To observe this centennial by humiliating some Americans because of the color of their skin would be a hideous blasphemy. Fortunately this was perfectly plain to the President of the United States, even though some members of the Civil War Centennial Commission had difficulty understanding it,” the editorial declared. At least one Southerner on the Commission agreed. “I want to go on record as supporting the President for two reasons,” Tennessee native and Emory University professor Bell I. Wiley said. “One, because I believe it is right and two, because I think that an executive agency of the Government, which I consider the Commission to be, should conform to presidential policy in such matters.” On the other hand, most Southerners involved in the commission believed Kennedy had overstepped his bounds. National Commission Vice-Chairman William H. Tuck, a Democratic Representative from Virginia opposed the compromise and said that the change to the navy base only happened “to meet the demands of the President.”<sup>13</sup>

In the end, the change of location occurred, and the ceremony proceeded without another major incident. However, Grant would not take part in much more of the Centennial celebration. Citing his wife’s declining health, he resigned his post as Commissioner on October 14, 1961. (Mrs. Grant would die the following June.) Kennedy replaced the former Major General with a career historian, Allen Nevins. In time, Nevins would

experience a protest over a Centennial event himself.

Despite the Confederate States Centennial Conference’s opposition to events that in their view might stir hard feelings, the Commission moved forward with plans for an event at the Lincoln Memorial on September 22, 1962 to honor the 100th anniversary of the initial announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation. The event was slated to include a speech from American Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson, a presentation of an original copy of the Proclamation by New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller to Nevins, a reading



Lincoln Memorial  
Courtesy of Library of Congress

of a special 80-line poem written by poet Archibald McLeish, a musical performance by the Marine Corps Band of composer Ulysses Kay’s “Forever Free: A Lincoln Chronicle,” and a performance of the Star-Spangled Banner and the Battle Hymn of the Republic by gospel singer Mahalia Jackson. Supreme Court Justices, Cabinet Members, diplomats and members of patriotic and Civil War groups were invited to attend.<sup>14</sup>

Despite its attempt at inclusiveness, the National Commission still managed to draw criticism. Bishop Smallwood E. Williams, an African American and head of the Washington chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, demanded that unless the Commission added an African American speaker, he would call for a boycott of the ceremony. He thought the National Commission sent the wrong message by

having the only two African American participants, Kay and Jackson, perform musically. Nevins’s initial reaction to the complaint was that having the two of them – regardless of their role – was what mattered, since Kay and Jackson “represent the distinction achieved by the Negro in [the] creative art of music.” But this response further angered Williams who thought Nevins’s statement “views Negroes as only able to participate in the program as musicians, thus ignoring other important contributions made by members of the race,” according to *The Washington Post*.<sup>15</sup>

Once again, President Kennedy decided to intervene. Through his congressional aide Arthur Schlesinger, Kennedy arranged for then Federal Judge (and future first African American Supreme Court Justice) Thurgood Marshall to be added as a speaker to the Emancipation anniversary event. When a Commission official claimed “we were too new and too busy to” make the arrangements, Schlesinger offered to assist.<sup>16</sup> With the addition of Marshall, Smallwood withdrew his call for a boycott. But he reminded the nation why he had protested the event in the first place.

“If our approach to the goal of full citizenship at times seems uncourteous and embarrassing one has only to reflect on the condition the Negro finds himself in today.” E. Franklin Jackson, local NAACP president, added “the time has come for the white power structure ... to know that the Negro has a great deal to offer in American life.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, some events commemorating the September 22nd anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation shined a spotlight on the current condition of African Americans 100 years after Lincoln announced his proclamation. The Brooklyn chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality used the symbolic anniversary to hold a 24-hour fast and vigil in front of the White House. Protestors held a coffin that said “RIP Jim Crow.”<sup>18</sup>

*Living up to the promise at the Soldiers’ Home*

During this time of Civil War commemorations and Civil Rights protests, the site where Lincoln nurtured his ideas on freedom and developed the Proclamation was under the radar of the Commission, but not immune to the national conflict and struggle for greater equality.

At the time of the Civil War Centennial, President Lincoln's Cottage was known as the Anderson Cottage after the Union commander at Fort Sumter, Robert Anderson, and in use as a dormitory. The campus, called the Soldiers' Home in Lincoln's time, had been renamed the US Soldiers' and Airmen's Home (USSAH) to reflect the newest branch of the military. As the Centennial commemoration began, the Cottage was remodeled to include an expanded recreation room with a library and TV component. With such modernization underway, there was little room for historical interpretation and commemoration. However, significant changes to the USSAH would occur over the next few years.

On the eve of the Centennial celebration, one former Women's Army Corps member was quartered in the Cottage. Regina Jones had been the only woman living at the Soldier's Home since her entry at the age of 47 on September 5, 1955. But over the course of the Centennial, more women were admitted to the home; by the end of the war the Anderson Cottage was exclusively used by women. According to an inspection report dated April 14, 1965 (exactly 100 years after Lincoln was assassinated), 25 women were living in the Anderson Cottage, with an extra vacancy open. The women were relatively evenly split between the Air Force and Army branches of the military. By this time, the Cottage had an elevator, a reception room, a recreation room, and its own laundry facilities.<sup>19</sup>

Though the increase of female residents of the home signified one meaningful change in the home's demographics it was by no means the only change symbolic of greater equality. In 1963,

about 125 of the 2,350 residents were African American. Although the dining and recreational facilities were integrated, other spaces on the grounds were segregated. In fact, Ward 6 of the hospital building was exclusively reserved for African Americans as per unofficial policy. According to the Soldiers' Home, this unofficial policy was the result of a 1954 survey in which African American residents at the time voted for segregation. Afterwards, new African American residents were automatically added to Ward 6.

That policy changed with William B. Parker. Parker, one of the youngest residents at the age of 35, called both the Pentagon and White House the day after he had his initial physical in mid July 1963 to complain about the practice of segregating residents receiving care at the hospital. Less than a week later the Pentagon updated the racial guidelines at the Soldiers' Home: "Under a new policy now in effect any member of the Soldiers' Home may be quartered in any portion of the hospital where he can receive needed medical treatment." Referring back to the original survey in which African American veterans voted for separate quarters, officials of the Soldiers' Home, according to *The Washington Post* "pointed out that most of the residents were members of the services when they were segregated. ... This created the earlier voting preferences of the men for voluntary segregation." But according to the same *Post* article, several African American residents of Ward 6 at the time of Parker's complaint had never been asked if they wanted separate facilities.<sup>20</sup>

Keeping with the theme of national unity over potential division, the Home's desegregation policy was not commemorated in the larger scheme of history. Ironically, journalists and historians missed a golden opportunity for such connections. The new desegregation policy, announced July 27, 1963, fittingly occurred in the 100th year since the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on January 1, 1863. So a century after Lincoln's Emancipation

Proclamation supported an end to slavery in Confederate areas and initiated the official recruitment of US Colored Troops, the Soldiers' Home witnessed another stride toward greater equality. As historian Matthew Pinsky wrote in "A Long Road to Sanctuary," with the integration of black residents 100 years after Lincoln's historic document became law, the Soldiers Home "finally began living up to the promise that [Lincoln's] offer of freedom had implied."<sup>21</sup>

#### END NOTES

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- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 A good example of such a scholar is Gaines Foster from LSU.
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- 12 "Bias in Centennial Scored by Kennedy," *The Washington Post*, March 18, 1961.
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- 17 "Negroes Withdraw Opposition to Centennial Fete," *The Washington Post*, September 20, 1962.
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- 21 Matthew Pinsky "The Soldiers' Home: A Long Road to Sanctuary," page 10.