

The Williamsburg Line

Williamsburg's Doctor in Blue

Peter Wager was born in Philadelphia in 1823 and attended medical school at the University of Pennsylvania. He was commissioned as an assistant-surgeon in the Fifth Pennsylvania Cavalry as the Civil War began. Arriving in Williamsburg, VA shortly after the battle of May 5, 1862, he was concerned with the care of Confederate wounded who remained in the town, but soon found himself charged with a more difficult task.

On August 21, 1862, the Federal provost marshal of the town assigned Dr. Wager to be the superintendent of the Eastern Lunatic Asylum (present-day site of Colonial Williamsburg's reconstructed Public Hospital). With a small staff, he quickly requisitioned the necessary food and medicines and soon had the hospital running efficiently. He found a special friend in Miss Sallie Galt, whose late brother had been the last superintendent. She lent Dr. Wager her brother's books on the care of the mentally ill.

Besides his care of the asylum patients, Wager took it upon himself to provide medical care to several residents of the town. When Confederate forces raided the town in April 1863, he offered the protective sanctuary of the hospital to the people of the town. He also recognized the historical significance of the old colonial capital, trying in vain to stop the destruction of the remaining outbuildings of the Royal Governor's Palace.

Fortunately, he did succeed in having the 18th century statue of Lord Botetourt removed from the constant fighting around the Wren Building at the College of William and Mary. On his own authority, he had it brought to the asylum for storage and safekeeping.

Dr. Wager remained in charge of the hospital for almost eight months after Confederate General Lee surrendered at Appomattox, VA. He was then reassigned as the surgeon responsible for Federal troops remaining near Williamsburg at Fort Mageruder and Yorktown. He held that post until his death on Christmas Day 1868 in Williamsburg.



WBA's Drew Gruber & Carson Hudson, Jr., at Dr. Wager's Memorial Stone

Preservation Opportunity

In August, the Williamsburg Battlefield Association, in cooperation with the Civil War Trust, applied for a grant through the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. The Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund is a matching grant program that helps non-profit organizations preserve battlefield land. Our application focuses on preserving a small, undeveloped tract of land that is within the core boundaries of the Williamsburg Battlefield. We will learn the outcome of our application soon and will post the results on our Facebook page.

Upon his death, ladies of the town determined to lay Dr. Wager to rest in the Episcopal churchyard. At a small ceremony on December 27, Dr. Wager was buried as Rev. Thomas Ambler officiated. The only persons present were all ex-Confederates, but they had valued the presence of U.S. Army Surgeon Dr. Peter Wager in their town.

Through donations, this past January the WBA provided for a small memorial stone over Dr. Wager's unmarked grave. With the permission and cooperation of Bruton Parish Church, Dr. Wager's war-time service in Williamsburg was remembered.

"The battle of Williamsburg has received less importance in history than it has merited."

Edwin Brown- 1st Mass Vol Infantry

Education & Preservation

New Historical Highway Marker: UPDATE

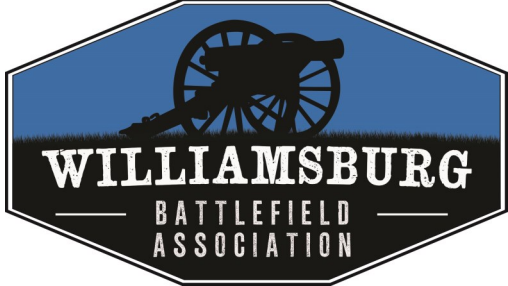
Thanks to many of you, the WBA was able this past May, during the Give Local 757 fundraising event for non-profits, to raise the funds to sponsor replacement and relocation of the old Battle of Williamsburg historical highway marker. To date and in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the text for the new marker has been drafted and a new location for installation discussed. The Virginia Board of Historic Resources will consider our proposal on December 10. Upon a vote of approval, the new sign will be fabricated. Installation will occur in the new year, and more information will be provided at a later date as to when and where that event will take place.

What Can the WBA Do for You?

Coming to the Williamsburg area? Contact the WBA about a personal tour of the Williamsburg Battlefield or to receive information on a driving tour. Do you need a speaker for your Civil War Round Table or organization? Consider the WBA. Earlier this month, the WBA's Tom McMahon traveled to Youngstown, OH to speak to the Mahoning Valley Civil War Round Table (MVCWRT). Tom presented an overview of the 1862 Peninsula Campaign with special emphasis on the Battle of Williamsburg. Thank you MVCWRT. We appreciate your warm reception of Tom, interest in the Battle of Williamsburg, and donation to the WBA.

Upcoming Events:


- March 5 & 6, 2016—*Battle of Hampton Roads Weekend* at the Mariners' Museum
- March 19 & 20, 2016—*Military Through the Ages* at Jamestown Settlement
- April 2, 2016—Civil War Trust Park Day
- May 3 & 4, 2016—Give Local 757




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