

The Williamsburg Line

**GIVE
LOCAL
757!™**

Thank you for making this year's Give Local 757 the WBA's most successful yet. You helped us raise \$2,446! We will be using these funds to join the digital bandwagon with other historic sites and educational groups that pivoted to this medium during the virus. The WBA is in the process of creating several short videos about different aspects of the Battle of Williamsburg and the town's Federal occupation. We are working with a local videographer to tell some of the stories we have. Our first videos will concern the activities of Sarah Edmonds (a.k.a. Pvt. Franklin Thompson of the 2nd Michigan Volunteers) during the May 5, 1862 battle and the dramatic story of what happened in Williamsburg when the Emancipation Proclamation took effect on January 1, 1863.

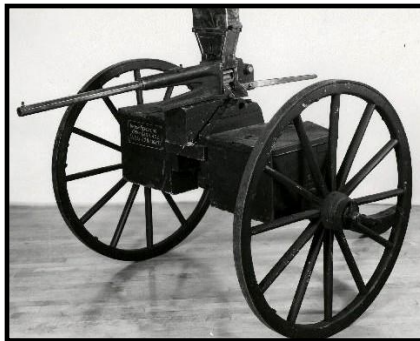
An Impromptu Park Day

Due to the virus, the WBA again decided this spring to ere on the side of caution and not host a public Park Day clean-up on the Smith Lot. With no clean-up occurring for two years, though, the site was looking a little trashy. We are, therefore, very grateful for the impromptu volunteers from the nearby Whittaker's Mill community who joined together on March 13 to remove 14 bags of litter totaling about 200 pounds from the roadsides around the lot. We anticipate hosting Park Day next year, and look forward to seeing you again in person and unmasked!



Whittaker's Mill volunteers at the Smith Lot (photo from the WBA)

Williamsburg & the "Coffee Mill Gun"



Agar Machine Gun (www.forgottenweapons.com)

On March 16, Paul Hoza, the host of the podcast *Untold Civil War*, interviewed WBA historian Carson Hudson about the Battle of Williamsburg. During the interview, the importance of the battle was discussed along with the use of the Agar machine gun (or "Coffee Mill Gun") by New York "Excelsior" brigade troops during the fighting. Numerous weapon improvements and inventions occurred during the Civil War. Find out more about this early Union repeating gun and its use at Williamsburg. Listen to the podcast entitled "Colonial Williamsburg Rebranded" by clicking on the icon below.



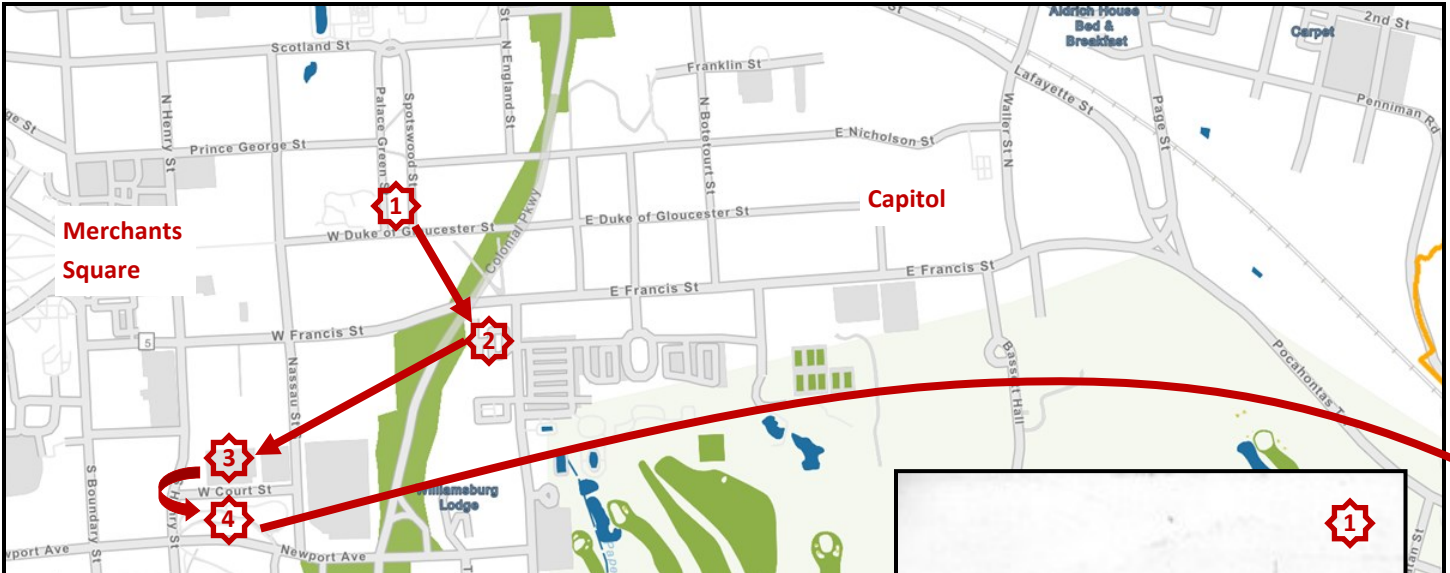
[COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG REBRANDED](#)

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

Edwin Brown- 1st Mass Vol Infantry

A Place Fit ...

Williamsburg's Confederate Monument turned 113 years old this May 5 and commemorated the occasion with a new home. The 20' tall, granite obelisk recently relocated to the Ft. Magruder historic site on Penniman Road in James City County. This isn't the monument's first move, though. You could say it has been around the block a few times.



Map of Williamsburg and James City County (www.williamsburg.maps.arcgis.com)

In 1905, the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) began efforts to raise money to erect a monument to the men of Williamsburg and James City County who served in the Confederacy during the Civil War. Funds came from private donations and municipal appropriations from Williamsburg and James City County. Williamsburg also approved erection of the monument on the Palace Green opposite Bruton Parish Church. Couper Marble Works of Norfolk, VA crafted the obelisk, which was to be unveiled on May 5, 1907, the 45th anniversary of the Battle of Williamsburg. Upon delivery, though, the shaft was found to be defective. The replacement arrived in December and the dedication was rescheduled for January 1908 on General Robert E. Lee's birthday. Winter weather and concern for the health of the aged veterans coming to the event caused postponement of the ceremony again until May 5. The day was cloudy and chilly, but about one thousand attendees marched from the 1770 Courthouse to the Palace Green for the unveiling. Cannons were fired, songs sung, poems read, and speeches given.



Monument on Palace Green looking west towards Bruton Parish Church (date unknown) (www.calisphere.org)



Photo of the 1932 Courthouse taken in 1937 from Francis Street with monument circled in red (www.williamsburg.kspot.org)

The monument remained on the Palace Green until 1932 when the land was sold to the Williamsburg Holding Corp. (now the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation). It then moved for the first time to the southwest corner of Francis Street and South England Street where a new courthouse had been constructed to replace the historic 1770 Courthouse on Duke of Gloucester Street that had also been purchased by the Williamsburg Holding Corp. The monument and courthouse remained here until 1969 when the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation purchased the South England Street property, which is now part of the Williamsburg Lodge site.

... for a Monument

The monument and courthouse functions then moved for the second time to a new location and building on the northside of Court Street. When the courthouse functions moved to their present location on Monticello Avenue in 1999, the monument remained behind. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation acquired the Court Street property in 2001, and it is now part of the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum site. Prior to the sale of the property, the UDC received permission from the city to move the obelisk for the third time to Bicentennial Park on the southside of Court Street.

Following the death last May in Minneapolis, MN of George Floyd, a black man in police custody, protests over racial inequality and police brutality occurred across the nation. Some of the protests gathered at and resulted in vandalism to Confederate monuments. While no such protests occurred at Williamsburg's Confederate Monument, it was defaced with graffiti in June 2020. This prompted City Council to hold a public hearing to receive input on the future of the monument. Afterwards, City Council voted to remove the obelisk from the public park, which it did last August, and to store it until the UDC could identify a new location for it.



Monument in front of 1969 Courthouse on Court Street (date unknown)
(www.williamsburg.kspot.org)



Base of monument in Bicentennial Park with "BLM" graffiti from June 2020
(www.wydaily.com)



Last month, the monument was moved for the fourth time and installed inside the historic remains of Ft. Magruder, the once large Confederate redoubt that anchored the Williamsburg defensive line in 1862 and is owned by the UDC. The fort was named for General John Magruder, whose small Confederate army defended the peninsula early in 1862 and consisted of several local regiments. Men from Williamsburg and James City County serving in these regiments occupied the Williamsburg line on May 4, 1862 during the prelude to the May 5 battle. It is perhaps timely and appropriate then that the obelisk dedicated to their service has now come to reside at Ft. Magruder, a place uniquely fit for this monument.

Left: Monument newly installed at the Ft. Magruder historic site (May 2021 photo by the WBA)

Battle of Williamsburg Poem

I.
With hearts that burn with patriot fire, and cheeks with glory
flushed,
Three times five thousand stalwart men on Fort Magruder
rushed;
Its crest frowned down three thousand yards with bristling files
of steel,
And belching cannon on the height made charging columns
reel.
The sharp tirailleur, with deadly aim, from rifle pits look out;
While shell and ball and cannister pour in from each redoubt.
Still on, with steady tramp they stride, through dank and
drenching rain,
And deadly blasts sweep through the ranks that gape but close
again!

II.
Through smoke and fire, and leaden hail, The Flag moves proud-
ly by,
Its Stars are flashing in the air, its Stripes blaze in the sky!
It ushers on the wished for aid, of cannon from the rear,
And Weber's battery thunder speaks, a welcome to the ear!
And now they pour a fusillade back in the rebel teeth,
And many a traitor's soul takes wing to many a dark cloud's
wreath!
Our gallant soldiers forward spring, each eager to be first,
The abattis's scaled and on the murderous guns they burst.
The frightened gunners fly for life, the fiery flood is turned,
And now they teach the bloody rite to those of whom they
learned.

III.
Like huge, unbroken blocks of stone, each regiment is hurled,
The crash is like the crash of doom that sweeps away a world!
"Excelsior! Excelsior!"
Three thousand men drive down –
The battle cry upon their lips shall win a world's renown!
Through blood and fire, through smoke and storm, they plunge
their onward course,
The flash of cannon in the van makes way for man and horse!
"Excelsior! Excelsior!"
Bold Dwight is at their head,
And every inch of ground they gain with loyal blood is red.
Their front, that like the rocky shore repels the beating waves,
Strews food along the rebel ranks to fill a thousand graves.

IV.
Through wood and field, and ravine deep, the reinforcements
tore,
Their hopeful cries rise high above a hundred cannon's roar!
They charge! And as an avalanche glides down the mountain
height,
So swept they every living thing that lay before the sight!
With Kearney, Berry, Jameson, to cheer them on the way,
The fiery band fights hand to hand through all the bloody fray.
The rebel lips are filled with taunts, with curses and with jeers,
That fall like idle raillery on deafened loyal ears.
No taunt or curse can stay their course, they go where they are
led,
Their steps are marked in fire and blood, with dying and with
dead.

V.
A moment hung the battle fate, hung trembling in the scale,
The air is full with dying shrieks, that mingle with the gale.
A word from gallant Heintzelman, a score of bands burst out,
With strains that change the dying shrieks to one victorious
shout.
Like spirit songs the music heaves above the din of strife,
Recalling hope to faltering hearts, the wounded back to life!
Once more the columns close and form, their tattered flags
unfurled;
Once more on trench and palisade the might mass is hurled.
Down go the serried ranks and files, with every headlong thrust,
And rebel strength and rebel pride is trodden in the dust.

VI.
The field is almost won, and yet once more the foemen stand;
With falling hearts they dress their ranks, responsive to com-
mand.
With slow advance the lines come on, o'er yet untrodden
green,
Till two score yards are all that lie the frowning foes between.
"Charge, gentlemen!" brave Hancock cries – the mass moves on
like wind –
The blinding smoke from volleys past is floating far behind.
Their bayonets flash, the shouting line speeds down by slope
and plain!
The staggered foe a moment stands, his ranks are rent in twain!
To pause, and gaze with starting eyes – "Too late!" the work is
done,
The glorious field of Williamsburg is nobly fought and won!

The above poem was sent to the WBA several years ago. The sender included the name and date of the poem's source publication. Unfortunately, the WBA did not retain this important information and doesn't recall whom the sender was. The WBA recalls that the poem's author was unknown and that the poem and publication were contemporaneous to the Civil War years. If any one knows or discovers the source for this poem, please contact the WBA.