



1922-2007

**Friends of the
Thomas Balch
Library, Inc.**

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The Thomas Balch Chronicle

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A Library for History and Genealogy

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Friends' 11th Annual Meeting Elects Officers, Author Marc Leepson Speaks About Our Flag

On Sunday, January 7, 2007, the Friends chose Brenda Douglass as President, Prescott Engle as Vice-president, Annie Hulen as Secretary and Jeff Bolyard as Treasurer. Welcomed were new Board members, Cindy Bridgman, Lori Kimball and Patty Rogers-Renner. Outgoing Board member O. Leland Mahan was recognized for his years of service.

Journalist and historian Marc Leepson, author of six books, addressed the group, speaking on his 2005 book, *Flag: An American Biography* (Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press).

Excerpts from his talk:

"The most surprising thing I learned while doing research for *Flag: An American Biography*, a history of the Stars and Stripes from the beginnings to today, is: nearly everything I thought I knew about the early history of the American flag is wrong. And not just the widespread and thoroughly discredited myth that Betsy Ross made the first Stars and Stripes or that she helped George Washington design the flag.

I learned that the only thing we know for certain about the origins of the Stars and Stripes is that on June 14, 1777, the Second Continental Congress chose thirteen stars "white in a blue field representing a new constellation," and thirteen stripes "alternate red and white" to honor the 13 original states. Nearly everything else amounts to an unsolved historical mystery.

We don't know, for example, who introduced that First Flag Resolution or, as some have postulated, if a flag committee that included George Washington did so. No official records, diary entries, letters, or contemporary newspaper accounts have surfaced that even mention a congressional flag committee. The *Annals of Congress* of Saturday, June 14, 1777, merely reports that during a short session that day the resolution was adopted without any debate, comments, or explanations.

The Flag Resolution of 1777 did not set the dimensions, the proportions, the size of the canton (where the stars are) or the field (where the stripes are) or even the shape of the flag. Nor did the Resolution say anything about the shape of the stars or the pattern for the stars in the constellation. Astonishingly, those specifications were not adopted officially until President William Howard Taft signed an executive order on July 4, 1912, accepting a presidentially appointed committee's recommendation setting out the star arrangement for the forty-eight star flag, which became official that day. That executive order marked the first time since the Stars and Stripes was born in 1777 that the government officially clarified exactly how the flag should look.

Why was the 1777 Flag Resolution so vague and

so little noted in Congress – or, for that matter, by the citizenry at large? The answer has to do with the fact that in revolutionary America the flag was not looked upon as the archetypal symbol it would become a century later. It would be a stretch, in fact, to say that in 1777 Americans even recognized the Stars and Stripes as the national emblem or symbol.

"A handful of militia units flew versions of the Stars and Stripes during the Revolutionary War. But the flag never was officially supplied to the Continental Army, apocryphal accounts and fanciful paintings – most notably Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze's 1851 *George Washington Crossing the Delaware* – notwithstanding. The 1846-48 Mexican War (not the Revolution or the War of 1812) has the distinction of being the first conflict in which American troops officially fought under the Stars and Stripes.

"Two other critical questions also fall in the unclear category: the identity of

the person who came up with the thirteen-star, thirteen-stripe design and exactly why Congress chose the stars and stripes and the red-white-and-blue color scheme. Historians have found no definitive answers to these questions mainly because records either were not kept, were destroyed, or have yet to be discovered. The best guess is that the flag's designer was Francis Hopkinson, a member of the Continental Congress from New Jersey. Hopkinson was a colonial Renaissance man – a poet, artist, essayist, inventor and musician. He also was an expert in heraldry and helped design the Great Seal of the United States. In 1780, Hopkinson sent an invoice to Congress for designing three things: the Treasury Board seal, "7 devices for the Continental Currency," and "the Flag of the United States of America."

"One common theory, which has been discredited by historians and flag experts, is that the stars and stripes came from the Washington family coat-of-arms, which contains two horizontal stripes or bars on a white field topped by three red five-pointed stars. That supposition almost certainly is an apocryphal attempt to add to Washington's patriotic legend. Historians can find no mention of the connection between the two symbols until 1876. The lack of contemporary evi-



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dence, the fact that the design of the Washington coat-of-arms is very different than the Stars and Stripes, and Washington's well known disdain for these kinds of trappings lead clearly to the conclusion that the two are not related.

"Why were stars chosen to represent the states? The best guess is that it has to do with the fact that stars have been used as a heraldic device since ancient times to symbolize humankind's strong desire to achieve greatness. They most likely found their way onto the flag because most of the Founding Fathers were Freemasons, and stars hold a strong place in Masonic iconography.

"As for the colors, we have no official explanation for the choice of red, white and blue. The closest thing consists of the views of Charles Thomson, the secretary of the Continental Congress who also was instrumental in the design of the Great Seal. 'The colours,' of the Great Seal, Thomson said in 1782, 'are those used in the flag of the United States of America. White signifies purity and innocence. Red hardiness and valour and Blue . . . signifies vigilance, perseverance and justice.'

"Variations of Thomson's 'meaning of the colors' have been expounded ever since. Most often the explanation is stated as though it is official government policy. But the red, white, and blue do not have – nor have they ever had – any official imprimatur. Historians believe that the colors in the Stars and Stripes were inspired by the first, short-lived American flag, the Continental Colors, which George Washington first flew on January 1, 1776. It had 13 red and white stripes and the Union Jack in the canton. And there is little doubt where the red, white and blue of the Continental Colors came from: the Union Jack of England, the mother country."

Black History Committee

Herbert DuVall was elected Chair of the Friends' Black History Committee, replacing Mary Randolph.

This very active group recently published a monograph by Lemoine Pierce, *George Washington Carver: Scientist, Artist & Musician*, and a timeline of the African American experience in Loudoun County, entitled "Journey Through Time."

Elaine Thompson's *In the Watchfires: The Loudoun County Emancipation Association, 1890-1971* is now available also on-line at Internet Bookselling:

<http://store.atozproductions.com>

Not So Long Ago: The "Grand Fight Near Leesburg"

by Gail Ann Adams

Of the several battles and skirmishes fought during the Civil War in Loudoun County, perhaps the most notable was the Battle of Ball's Bluff in Leesburg. This Battle took place October 21, 1861. The topography of Ball's Bluff played a key role as the Bluff faces the Potomac River and ranges from 70 to 90 feet high. This put the Union forces at a distinct and unexpected disadvantage.

Union Brigadier General Charles Pomeroy Stone was ordered to stage a "slight demonstration" (increased firing by the pickets) at Edwards Ferry to distract the Confederates and glean positions. Stone supervised the crossing at Edwards Ferry and decided on a second demonstration two miles upriver. He delegated that task to Colonel Edward D. Baker. Colonel Baker was Oregon's first Senator and a close friend of Lincoln. Stone left the situation completely to Baker's discretion. Instead of crossing to the Bluff to personally evaluate tactical options, Colonel Baker immediately chose to cross his entire force to the Virginia side.

The Confederates were commanded by Brigadier General Nathan G. Evans. Fort Evans, one of three forts on elevated ground just east of Leesburg, was named for him. When it became apparent to Evans that the main fight would take place at Ball's Bluff, he sent his 8th Virginia Regiment, of which several of the companies had been recruited in Loudoun County, and he added the 17th and 18th Mississippi as well.

It was a sharp and bloody battle culminating in a Confederate bayonet charge. The Union troops were forced to choose between surrender or retreating off the Bluff. Almost one half of the 2000 Union troops were killed, wounded, captured, or missing. Dead bodies floated as far downriver as Washington. Colonel Baker was among those killed. Seriously wounded, Lt. Oliver Wendall Holmes recovered and later served on the Supreme Court. There were less than 150 Confederate casualties. Fifty-four Union graves are honored at the Ball's Bluff National Cemetery. The Confederate dead were buried in Union Cemetery in Leesburg.

Many Loudouners rejoiced over the Confederate victory. The headline in *The Democratic Mirror* called it "The Grand Fight Near Leesburg." In 1866, Herman Melville wrote a number of poems about the Civil War. One dealt with the battle at Ball's Bluff. Its final verse reads:

*Weeks passed; and at my window, leaving bed,
By night I mused, of easeful sleep bereft
On those brave boys (Ah War! Thy theft);
Some marching feet
Found pause at last by cliffs Potomac cleft;
Wakeful I mused, while in the street
Far footfalls died away till none were left.*



Union retreat at Ball's Bluff

COURTESY THOMAS BALCH LIBRARY

Some New Acquisitions at Thomas Balch Library

Catholic Trails West, by Edmund Adams
Confederate Heroines, by Thomas Lowry
Dixie's Daughters, by Karen Cox
Guide to Genealogical & Biographical Sources for NYC, by Rosalie Bailey
Hispanic Confederates, by John O'Donnell-Rosales
Kentuckians in Missouri, by Stuart Sprague
Kentuckians in Ohio and Indiana, by Stuart Sprague
Magna Charta Barons 1898, by Charles Browning
Marriage & Death Notices 1826-1845, North Carolina, by Carrie Broughton
Marriages of Monmouth Co., New Jersey, by George Gibson

Marriages of Orange County, Virginia, by Therese Fisher
Rockingham County, by Scott Suter
Ships from Ireland to Early America, vol. 1, by David Dobson
Sourcebook to Public Record Information, BRB Publications
West Tennessee's Forgotten Children, by Alan Miller
Clarke Co. Marriages; Culpeper Co. Marriages; Fauquier Land Deeds, 7 vols.; *Frederick Co., Virginia, Land Deeds & Wills*, 5 vols.; *Northampton Co. Marriages; Page Co. Marriages; Shenandoah Co. Births*; and *Warren Co. Births, Deaths, and Marriages*.
by Dee Ann Buck
LaVonne Markham

From the Friends . . .

As the newly elected President of Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, Inc., I urge you to join the Thomas Balch Library, Loudoun County Historical Society, Loudoun Restoration and Preservation Society, as they present an outstanding series of lectures by distinguished historians. The lectures, "Loudoun 1757: On the Border of Mayhem," commemorate the 250th Anniversary of Loudoun's creation in the midst of European and New World conflict. Funded in part by a grant from The Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy, the series promises a fascinating view of the world at the time of Loudoun's founding.

Sunday, April 16, at 2 pm, Carl J. Ekberg, Professor of History Emeritus at Illinois State University will speak on "The French Challenge to British North America" and its effect on the English and their plans for Virginia and beyond.

Sunday, May 6, at 2 pm, we will hear from Paul W. Mapp, historical author and an assistant professor at the College of William and Mary. He will address "The Seven Years' War and Changing British Imperial Objectives." Defeats of the British in the New World wonderfully directed its government's attention to the effort to deny French encroachment on the then British outposts.

Sunday, June 17, at 2 pm, Timothy J. Shannon will explore the role played by Native Americans in "Caught in the Middle: The Indigenous Response to Foreign Imperial Designs." Dr. Shannon, as an associate professor of History at Gettysburg College, has written extensively about the Native American effect on the European conflict being played out in the New World.

Sunday, September 16, at 2 pm, Warren Hofstra, in "When a World War is the Home

Front: The Seven Years' War on Virginia's Frontiers" will describe how what we now call the French and Indian War impacted the early European settlers. Included in those affected were not just transplanted Europeans, but the imported African population as well. Dr. Hofstra is an author and now holds the Stewart Bell Professor of American History chair at Shenandoah University.

Sunday, October 21, at 2 pm, Friends Board member and extensive researcher Douglas Foard will present his findings about the life and activities of "The Imperious Laird: John Campbell, Loudoun's Namesake." Campbell never once visited Virginia, but Dr. Foard explores why the Williamsburg legislature named the new jurisdiction "Loudoun," despite his dismissal as British commander in 1757. Dr. Foard, a retired history professor from Ferrum College, was former Executive Secretary of Phi Beta Kappa, the nation's oldest academic honor society.

In addition to this prestigious series, don't miss this season's two remaining Thomas Balch Library Lecture Series:

Sunday, March 18, at 2 pm, "Mapping of the American Civil War" will be addressed by Richard W. Stephenson, author, scholar, and former head of the Geography and Map Reading Room at the Library of Congress.

Sunday, April 29, at 2 pm, Marie Tyler-McGraw and Deborah A. Lee present "Virginians in Liberia: The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here; The Lack of Money Kept Us Here." This is the story of free and emancipated African Americans who emigrated to the colony established by the American Colonization Society between 1820 and 1865, told by two eminent and highly skilled scholars and researchers.

Please join us!

Brenda Douglass, President

New & Renewing Members

Gail Adams
A.D. & Jane Bogle
Jeff & Laura Bolyard
Roberto Costantino
Randy Femrite
Christopher Fennell
Alexandra S. Gressitt
Doris M. Gressitt
Susan O. Haswell
Jim Hershman
Louisa S. Hutchison
Evelyn A. Johnson
Carty & Rennee Lawson
Diana C. Lehman
Robert & JoAnn Lyon
O. Leland & Cecelia Mahan
Jean P. McDonald
Ken & Michaela McIntyre
Carolee C. Moore
Fred & Betty Morefield
Ken & Susan Parks
Carolyn & Samuel Rogers, Jr.

A Reminder

Be certain to renew your Friends' membership. Check your label for your own renewal date, and use the form below to enlist your friends.

The Manager's View

Many exciting events are planned for spring and early summer. There will be talks on mapping in the Civil War, Virginians in Liberia and a whole series of lectures commemorating Loudoun County's 250th Anniversary. (See above)

Friends of TBL recently purchased for the Library a camcorder to record our programs and events. Not only is the Library excited to be able to record these events for later use by researchers, but also to make them available for broadcast on the Town of Leesburg's television station.

During a recent budget exercise for the Town of Leesburg and with the help of members of

the Friends, I compiled volunteer hours for the Friends from 2004 to January 2007. Based on nationally established rates I then computed your contribution as approximately \$33,844 per year. This contribution is in addition to the direct and indirect support (averaging approximately \$16,834 annually between 2003 and 2006) provided through honoraria, collection development, equipment and marketing. Such support enables us to provide quality programming, educational opportunities for staff, equipment, and collection materials not otherwise available through routine budgeting. Your

contributions are invaluable and appreciated by staff and patrons.

In December new officers for the Black History Committee were installed and in January new officers and board members of Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, Inc. were elected. Congratulations to each and every one. I look forward to working with you in the coming year.

It will be my pleasure to see you at some or all of our programs in the coming months.

Alexandra S. Gressitt

I would like to become a member of **Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, Inc.**

Name(s) _____

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Benefactor \$250 Sustaining \$100 Patron \$50 Business \$35
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The Thomas Balch
Chronicle
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*A Must See:
 The Upcoming 250th
 Anniversary Lecture Series
 (Details Inside)*

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Full set of five volumes plus companion map	\$100.00	_____	_____
<i>The Essence of A People: Portraits of African Americans Who Made A Difference in Loudoun County, Virginia</i>	\$ 15.00	_____	_____
<i>The Essence of A People II: African Americans Who Made Their World Anew in Loudoun Co., and Beyond</i>	\$ 15.00	_____	_____
<i>Loudoun County's African American Communities: A Tour Map and Guide</i>	\$ 5.00	_____	_____
<i>A Taste of Loudoun County: Our Favorite Recipes 1903-1951 Home Interest Club Cookbook - Centennial Edition</i>	\$ 10.00	_____	_____
<i>A Story of Round Hill, Loudoun County, Virginia</i> by Ann W. Thomas	\$ 20.00	_____	_____
<i>In the Watchfires: The Loudoun County Emancipation Association, 1890-1971 - by Elaine Thompson</i>	\$ 20.00	_____	_____
<i>George Washington Carver: Scientist, Artist & Musician</i> by Lemoine D. Pierce	\$ 10.00	_____	_____

Total Enclosed _____

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