

Confederate Cannon Dedication, June 25, 2011
Hosted by
GEN. OTHO FRENCH STRAHL CAMP 176, UNION CITY, TENNESSEE

Paradox, Sacrifice, Honor, and Freedom

by Barbara G. Marthal

I wish to start by thanking Commander Ralph Nichols, Lt. Commander Danny Isbell, and all the other officers and members of the Otho French Strahl, SCV Camp # 176. I thank too, Mr. Billy Forrest who was also instrumental in my standing before you today. Thanks also to Mr. and Mrs. Parks. And thanks to all of you present here at this special event. I truly hope the few humble words I share with you today does honor to our ancestors and the occasion for which we have gathered.

I am a native of Nashville, Tennessee. I have been a teacher for fifteen years and a storyteller for twenty-five years. I became involved in reenacting Civil War History when I met Bill Harris twelve years ago. Last year we had a wonder Confederate wedding amongst family and friends at the Capt. William H. McCauley Sons of Confederate Veterans Camp 260 in Dickson, Tennessee.

Until our meeting, I knew nothing of Civil War reenactments. However it did not take long for us to discover that we had much in common. We both have a passionate love of history and family stories. My avocation is storytelling. The day Bill took me to the Blockade Runner, a store in Wartrace, Tennessee, I knew I had found a new venue that would allow

me to combine my love of history and research with my skills as a storyteller.

Speaking outside the medium of a story is a little awkward for me so I must admit that I am a bit nervous. But I promise you at least one short story before I return to my seat. We have come here to remember the deeds of our southern ancestors as they worked through the paradox of their times and made sacrifices to maintain their honor in their fight for independence and freedom.

Since becoming involved with reenacting, I have become audaciously proud of my southern heritage. Why? Well, I was born a southerner and like many southerners, I like a riveting story.

Southerners understand when confronted with history, every people will discover good times, bad times, happy times, sad times, issues that may embarrass them and much which will make them proud. No true examination of a people's history will exempt them from any of those elements of their account. But there is something unique about southerners. We are unique because we can look into every face of our history and yet emerge, holding our heads high. We are a people that can embrace our humanity without the need of apology.

We are totally conscious of the tremendous contributions our ancestors made in forging this nation. They laid the foundation of a nation with a

stronger commitment to freedom than any other nation on earth, while dealing with the paradox of slavery and freedom.

When I examine the history of our ancestors and see that they made a commitment to forge a nation dedicated to the principle of freedom for all men while grappling with the inheritance of a world wide ancient institution of slavery, I am amazed! They were given the legacy of slavery from the old world, yet still remained true to the idea of freedom in the new world.

They formed a federation of states known as the United States of America in order to bring to fruition the dream of freedom. When our southern ancestors thought that the Northern members of that federation infringed on the initial concept of freedom; southern states one by one in order to remain true to themselves and honor their founding fathers and mothers, announced their independence, and committed themselves to the Confederate States of America for the purpose of continuing the process of making a free people.

Please hold this thought because here I want to insert the brief story that I promised earlier. The story is entitled “Bah Lion and Bah Goat”; published with a collection of stories from the book entitled Gullah Folktales from the Georgia Coast, by Charles Colcock Jones, Jr. It is drawn from the traditions of slaves who worked and sacrificed in their fight for freedom as an integral part of the southland. It echoes one of the rich dialects of southern people.

Buh Lion bin a hunt, an eh spy Buh Goat duh leddown topper er big rock duh wuk eh mout an der chaw. Eh creep up fuh ketch um. Wen eh git clos ter um eh notus um good. Buh Goat keep on chaw. Buh Lion try fuh fine out wuh Buh Goat du eat. Eh yent see nuttne nigh um ceptin de nekked rock wuh eh duh leddown on. Buh Lion stonish. Eh wait topper Buh Goat. Buh Goat keep on chaw, an chaw, an chaw. Buh Lion cant mek de ting out, an eh come close, an ah say: “Hay! Buh Goat, wuh you duh eat?” Buh Goat skade wen Buh Lion rise up befo um, but eh keep er bole harte, an eh mek ansur: “Me duh chaw dis rock, an if you don’t leff, wen me done long um me guine eat you.” **Dis big wud sabe Buh Goat.** Bole man git outer diffikelty way coward man lose eh life.

Our southern ancestors, free and slave were bold peoples. They understood that one must fight for the principle of freedom. Freedom is won, when threatened, must be won again; when won again, freedom must be guarded. Our ancestors were not perfect and nowhere did there exist or will there ever exist a perfect state or a perfect people; the more imperfect the state, the more the need to struggle for freedom.

Our ancestors understood that freedom is an evolutionary and a revolutionary idea. In order to achieve an ideal, one starts where you are and commits to the fight. So whether free or slave, rich or poor, when confronted with an army invading their homeland, they pulled together to defend that land and its promise of freedom.

Let me take a moment to explain to you what is honorable about the deeds of our ancestors. When they withdrew from the federation of the USA, they did not expect a war. In fact, South Carolina Senator **James Chesnut** boldly promised “to drink all the blood that might be shed as a result of secession”.

They never expected war because they knew that secession was a legal act. But when war came and they faced the lion, an enemy many times larger, better equipped, stronger in industry and financial resources; they stood boldly and remained faithful to their commitment. They sacrificed until the bitter end.

What is it to sacrifice? They brought their honor, their courage, character, their reverence for their ancestors and stood before the lion in a bold defense of their principles. Bold people sacrifice. They do not lose their lives. In the face of fear, our southern ancestors brought courage, valor, audacity, self-reliance, heroism, gallantry, prowess, resolution (need I go on) and gave their lives to the cause of freedom. Many of them made the ultimate sacrifice of their lives.

Politically correct politicians and educators say that the south fought for slavery. We did not; we fought for independence and freedom. No more than 25% of southern whites owned slaves and of that 25%, no more than 5% owned twenty or more slaves, yet most all southern families loyal to the Confederacy sent family members to defend the southland. Near

95% of the blacks in the south were slaves. Most of those slaves remained loyal to the south and served the southland throughout the war. Had they not done so, the war between the USA and the CSA would have ended much sooner.

Slaves fought and served because they were a people hopeful of freedom in their homeland, the southland. It was not an unreasonable hope. Most slaves knew of communities or lived in communities that also included successful free people of color. They saw free people of color in church, towns, cities and the country side. Some of them were relatives who had purchased freedom or had been freed for merited service.

Then there were those slaves who negotiated with their masters the right to hire their labor and many times lived as “quasi-free persons” sometimes better off than poor free people of color or poor whites. A quarter of a million free people of color lived in the south. More free people of color lived in the south than in all of the northern states and territories combined. Most of those free people worked to prove their allegiance to their homeland and many slaves worked to prove to their masters and neighbors that they were a people deserving of freedom and were willing to sacrifice for that freedom.

I am tired of hearing the old argument that the south fought for slavery. Our ancestors fought for the freedom of self determination. They had

had a long history of addressing the issues of abolition and were working to address those issues when invaded by the army of the United States of America. That is why our presence here today is so very important. When we gather under the St. Andrews Cross in parks such as this one and when we dedicate cannons and memorials such as we are doing today; we honor the steadfast commitment of our ancestors.

We do this because we live in times when we too must make the commitment to freedom. Places like this one throughout the southland will inspire in us courage like that of our ancestors as we are challenged to face our own paradoxes, and called to make our own sacrifices for the honorable stand on the principle of freedom.

In short, paraphrasing the dedication from the book entitled Abraham Lincoln: The Southern View by Lochlainn Seabrook,

We are here to honor
1,000,000 European-Americans
300,000 African-Americans
70,000 Native-Americans
60,000 Latin-Americans,
50,000 foreigners,
12,000 Jewish-Americans
10,000 Asian-Americans

who donned Confederate gray and fought for the South in the cause of freedom, self-determination, and the preservation of the Constitution of the Founding Fathers.

We are here to say: I am proud to be American by birth and Southern by the grace of God.

I thank you again for this opportunity to share in this momentous occasion. I will end by singing to you a song that I sung to a group of children, ages 7-13 at the Sam Davis Home this spring. After singing the song, I asked the children how many of them had heard it before. Out of a group of about 30 children, only one raised a hand. When I finished the song, one of the children said, "I like that song". I shared with them that I had grown up singing it and that I too liked it. When you leave here today, I hope it will be your goal that more of our children will hear this song for the first time. "I wish I was in the land of cotton..."