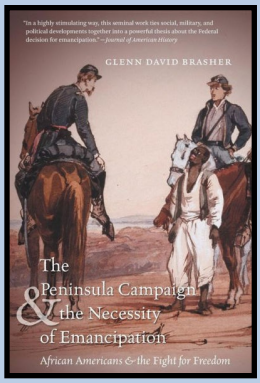
October 2020

WILLIAMSBURG BATTLEFIELD ASSOCIATION

The Williamsburg Line

Recommended Reading



In search of a good read for this winter? The WBA has recently added Glenn David Brasher's 2014 book, ***The Peninsula Campaign & the Necessity of Emancipation***, to its website's *Further Reading* page. While the Peninsula Campaign was a military failure for the Union Army, it was a victory for emancipation. Brasher illustrates how the actions of African-Americans during the campaign, including the Battle of Williamsburg, impacted Northern opinion on emancipation and eventually convinced many, including Lincoln, that it was a military necessity. Order your copy from Barnes & Noble or Amazon.

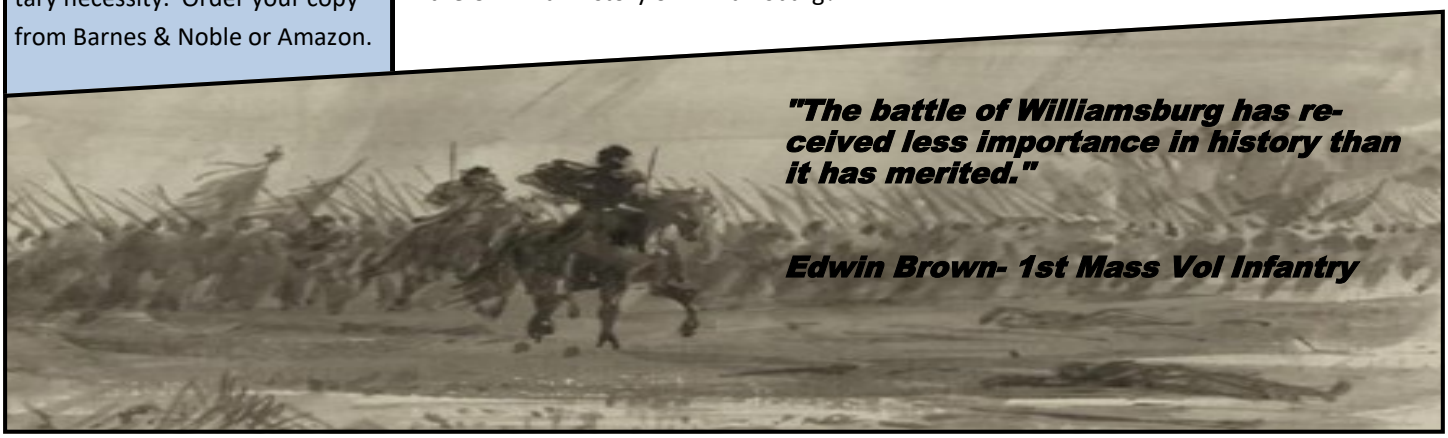
Where is the Morrison House?

Cary Peyton Armistead House on N. Henry Street (photo by the WBA)

Reconstructed Charlton Coffeehouse (photo by the WBA)

Congratulations to the Cary Peyton Armistead House in Williamsburg! This Victorian-style house was added to the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places this past summer. The house, which is now located on North Henry Street, was built in 1890 and once stood at the northeast corner of Duke of Gloucester Street adjacent to the reconstructed Capitol. It is one of very few Victorian-style buildings remaining in Williamsburg. When the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg began in the 1920s, buildings constructed after 1800 were either demolished or relocated. So, how did this structure survive, and why is it worth mentioning in this newsletter dedicated to the Civil War history of Williamsburg?

Visitors to Colonial Williamsburg today see the reconstructed Richard Charlton Coffeehouse on the former site of the Armistead House. The original structure was built in 1750 and leased by Mr. Charlton in the mid-1760s for operation as a coffeehouse and later a tavern. In 1765, Lt. Governor Francis Fauquier was confronted on the porch of the coffeehouse by an angry mob protesting the Stamp Act, and surviving account books indicate that both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson frequented the establishment in the years before the Revolution. The building and its front porch experienced historical events again a century later when it was the Morrison House. *(cont.'d on page 4)*



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

Edwin Brown- 1st Mass Vol Infantry

A Look Back in Time …

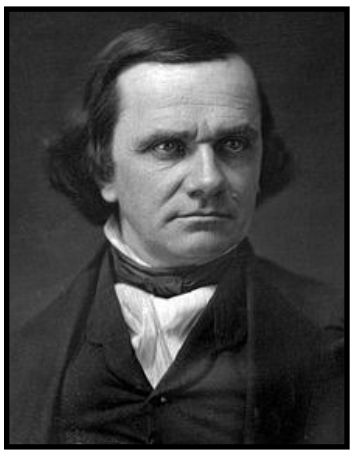
"Time Does Not Repeat Itself, But It Rhymes"

~ attributed to Mark Twain

The saying above surely describes this crazy election year of 2020. Our nation seems to be in the middle of a social and political crisis, with neither side willing to back down or compromise. As an historian, it reminds me of a similar time in American History 160 years ago in the presidential election of 1860. Let's take a look at what was happening and how it affected Williamsburg, VA.

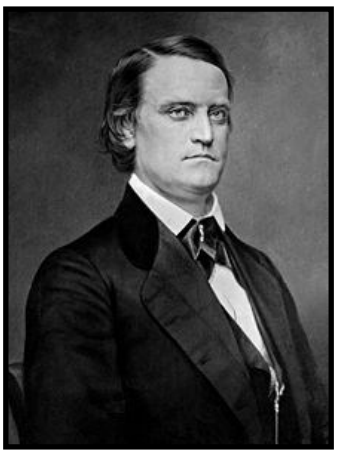
The country was in a crisis then also. Major issues were Federal tariffs, a homestead bill, and arguments over a northern or southern route for a transcontinental railroad. Unfortunately, it was the issue of slavery that drove everything else off the election table and became the only thing that any candidate talked about. Was slavery to be permitted in the new territories by the Federal Government, or was "Popular Sovereignty" the way to go? Extremists on both sides of the political spectrum argued everything from perpetual protection of slavery to immediate abolition of slavery. The issues fractured the country. Like today, no one was willing to compromise, and no one was willing to listen to any dissenting opinion.

The Democrats met to choose their candidate in Charleston, SC in April of 1860. After 57 votes, no one was nominated; and the radical, southern "fire-eater" delegates walked out, splitting the party into Northern and Southern Democrats. The Northern Democrats met again in Baltimore, MD and finally nominated Stephen Douglas of Illinois as their candidate. Their platform was "Popular Sovereignty," or the right of the people to decide for or against slavery in their state or territory.

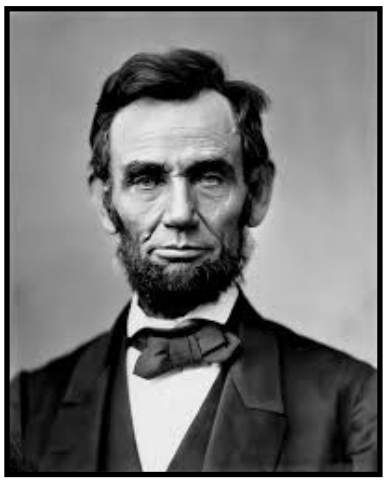


Above: Stephen Douglas (www.wikipedia.org)

Below: John Breckinridge (www.wikipedia.org)



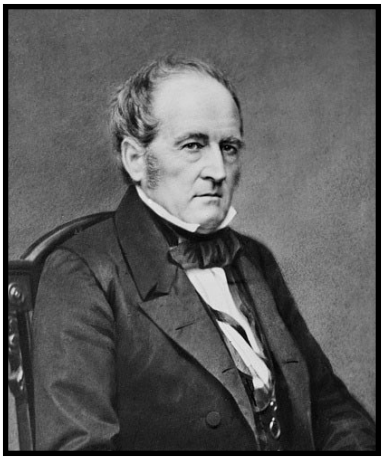
The Southern Democrats met in Richmond, VA and nominated the incumbent Vice President of the United States, John Breckinridge of Kentucky, as their candidate. Their platform pledged the protection of slavery in the territories.



Abraham Lincoln (www.wikipedia.org)

Meanwhile, the Republicans met in Chicago, IL in May. They were a relatively new party, having only one previous election in their experience. The favored candidate was Senator William Seward of New York, but he had enemies in the party and could not raise enough support. On the third ballot, Abraham Lincoln of Illinois, was nominated, mostly because of skillful campaign managers and the fact that no one had any complaint against him. The Republican platform promised not to interfere with slavery in the Southern States but was opposed to the further extension of slavery into the Western territories. Unfortunately, many in the South took this to mean that Abolitionists would control the country.

Between the fractured Democratic Party and the old Whig Party, there were many who were not happy with any of the choices or platforms. Thus, an Independent party was formed, the Constitutional Union Party. They nominated John Bell of Tennessee as their candidate. Bell advocated compromise and hoped to curtail Southern threats of secession. The party's slogan was Bell's entire platform: "The Union as it is, and the Constitution as it is."



John Bell (www.wikipedia.org)

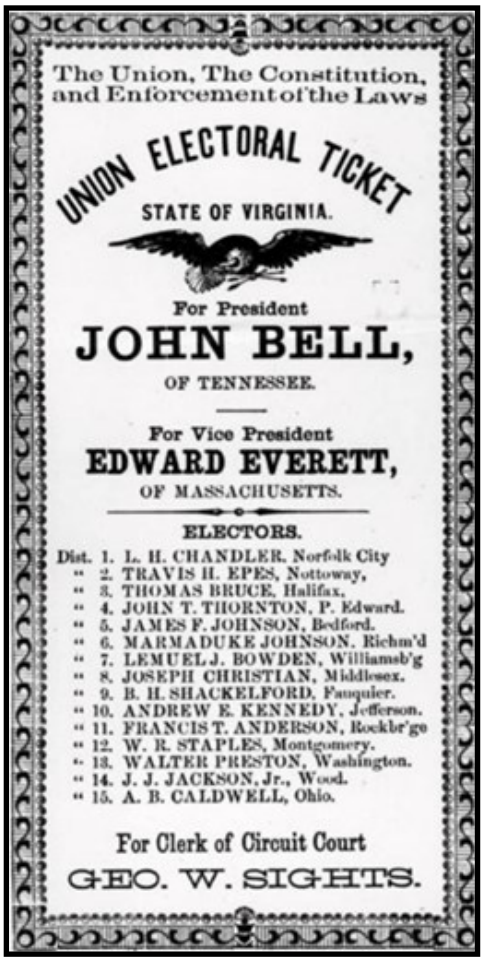
This set the scene for the election. Of the four candidates, only Douglas took to the campaign trail. The other candidates took the accepted practice of the time of staying close to home and letting their partisans give the speeches and rally support.

On election day itself, across the country the practice of voting was quite different from today. There were no national standards for voting qualifications. The Constitution stated that voting would be regulated by the individual states and require-

… at the Presidential Election of 1860

ments varied by state**.** In Virginia, the voting qualifications were that you needed to be a white male over the age of 21, of sound mind, and not disabled or living on public charity. Interestingly, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire allowed African-Americans to vote in 1860.

The idea of a secret ballot in a private booth was not the fashion. Americans in 1860 voted in one of two ways. The older of the two was by voice vote. You showed up at your polling place, presented yourself to the clerk, and verbally announced your choice before whoever was assembled. The clerk then officially recorded your vote. By the mid-19th century, however, the more common method was voting by "ticket." Because voters did not choose the president directly, but rather presidential electors, a voter had to cast a ticket or ballot for citizens of his state who were pledged to vote for their candidate in the Electoral College. The state did not provide ballots, but rather the individual parties printed electoral tickets. These could be printed in newspapers or handed out by party officials. On election day, you presented the ticket to the polling clerk; and after signing and acknowledging your vote, it was placed in the ballot box.


The Union, The Constitution, and Enforcement of the Laws

UNION ELECTORAL TICKET

STATE OF VIRGINIA.

For President

JOHN BELL,

OF TENNESSEE.

For Vice President

EDWARD EVERETT,

OF MASSACHUSETTS.

ELECTORS.

Dist. 1. L. H. CHANDLER, Norfolk City
" 2. TRAVIS H. EPES, Nottoway,
" 3. THOMAS BRUCE, Halifax,
" 4. JOHN T. THORNTON, P. Edward.
" 5. JAMES F. JOHNSON, Bedford.
" 6. MARMADUKE JOHNSON, Richm'd
" 7. LEMUEL J. BOWDEN, Williamsb'g
" 8. JOSEPH CHRISTIAN, Middlesex.
" 9. B. H. SHACKELFORD, Fauquier.
" 10. ANDREW E. KENNEDY, Jefferson.
" 11. FRANCIS T. ANDERSON, Rockbr'ge
" 12. W. R. STAPLES, Montgomery.
" 13. WALTER PRESTON, Washington.
" 14. J. J. JACKSON, Jr., Wood.
" 15. A. B. CALDWELL, Ohio.

For Clerk of Circuit Court

GEO. W. SIGHTS.

Above is the Virginia 1860 Election Ticket for the Constitutional Union Party and John Bell. Note that Williamsburg lawyer, Lemuel J. Bowden, a staunch Unionist, is listed as a Bell elector.

On election day, Virginia was fairly evenly divided between John Breckinridge and John Bell. There was some support for Douglas and truly little support for Lincoln. In the Deep South, there was virtually no support for Lincoln and, therefore, no electors and no tickets to cast as ballots. As there was no legal means to vote for the Republican nominee, no voter would publicly pledge to vote for Abraham Lincoln. In most of Virginia, no publisher would print ballots for Lincoln's pledged electors. In theory, a voter could cast a write-in ballot for Lincoln, however, it was necessary to know the names of his electors to include on the write-in ticket. Practically speaking, voting for the Republican Party in a pro-slavery community could be hazardous.

National Results:

Lincoln: 1,865,908 Votes (39.82%) 180 Electoral Votes
Douglas: 1,380,202 Votes (29.46%) 12 Electoral Votes
Breckinridge: 848,019 Votes (18.10%) 72 Electoral Votes
Bell: 590,901 Votes (12.61%) 39 Electoral Votes

Virginia's Results:

Bell: 74,481 Votes (44.63%) 15 Electoral Votes
Breckinridge: 74,325 Votes (44.54%) 0 Electoral Votes
Douglas: 16,198 Votes (9.71%) 0 Electoral Votes
Lincoln: 1,929 Votes (1.13%) 0 Electoral Votes

Local Results:

James City County
Breckinridge: 60 Votes
Bell: 148 Votes
Douglas: 5 Votes
Lincoln: 0 Votes

York County
Breckinridge: 90 Votes
Bell: 227 Votes
Douglas: 3 Votes
Lincoln: 0 Votes

Williamsburg City
Bell: 49 Votes (42.24%)
Breckinridge: 43 Votes (37.07%)
Douglas: 24 Votes (20.69%)
Lincoln: 0 Votes (0%)

It is interesting to note that, as late as November 1860, the people in and around Williamsburg were truly not interested in Lincoln and the Republican Party, but they also were not extreme secessionists. The general mood was to maintain the status quo.

Regardless of whom they voted for, the Election of 1860 dramatically displayed the exaggerated sectionalism in the country. In Virginia, everyone looked toward the future and was apprehensive of what might come next.

~ Article contributed by Carson O. Hudson, Jr.

Where is the Morrison House? (cont.'d)

By the time the Battle of Williamsburg occurred on May 5, 1862, the former coffeehouse had been the residence of the Morrison family for six decades. Charlotte Morrison, now an elderly widow, and her adult daughter, Miss Emily, remained in the house during the battle. Following the fighting, the Morrisons, like many Williamsburg citizens, took in severely wounded Confederate soldiers. Pvt. William J. Davis of Co. C in the 18th Virginia Infantry was shot through both legs during the fighting. Emily carefully nursed the young man, and he was improving when Federal authorities now occupying the town moved him to the Williamsburg Baptist Church against her wishes. His condition then began to quickly deteriorate, and he died on June 9 following amputation of his right leg. Town resident, Mrs. Cynthia Coleman, wrote in her essay, "Williamsburg During the Federal Occupation,"

> "Little Davis is dead, poor young boy far from home and mother to lay down his life. He has found in Miss Emily a faithful tender nurse. The whole Confederate heart of the town is filled with pity for the poor lad who having lost one leg has now lost his life. "

Emily was heartbroken and, along with other women of the town, attended the burial of the 20-year old soldier in the Cedar Grove Cemetery.

On at least three occasions during the town's occupation, Federal authorities attempted to force residents to sign an Oath of Allegiance to the United States. In early April 1863, the Morrisons faced possible eviction from town if they didn't sign the oath. Knowing her mother was too feeble to be moved, Emily agonized over the decision. Mrs. Coleman dramatically wrote,

> "In vain the pen was placed in her trembling hands; they had no power to hold it. Her mother from her seemingly dying bed exhorted her not to perjure herself. 'Let me not die, my daughter, seeing you take this lie upon your heart. Let me go into the presence of my Maker believing you true to yourself and to your Country.' "

The attending Federal officer was apparently so moved by the scene that he could not force compliance with the oath.

Emily's nerves had little time to recover, though. A week later, Confederate raiders forced the Federal troops out of Williamsburg and east of town into Union-held Fort Magruder. Union artillery in the fort responded by shelling the town. Williamsburg resident, John Coupland, wrote in a letter to his mother that, "Mrs. Morrison's kitchen was penetrated by a ball" and "her porch steps torn up by a shell." Thankfully, Emily and her mother were uninjured, and the house and kitchen didn't catch fire.

Emily continued to live in the house until her death in 1887. She is buried in the Bruton Parish churchyard with a small stone marking her grave. Barely readable on the stone now is the epithet, "She hath done what she could." In 1933, Eliza Baker, a former slave born in Williamsburg about 1845, gave an interview in which she recalled Emily operating a millinery store from the Morrison House. She also recalled taking flowers to Emily every day when she lived across the street from the Morrison House in the Vest House (now called the Palmer House by Colonial Williamsburg).

Emily Morrison's marker (www.findagrave.com)

After Emily's death, Cary Peyton Armistead purchased the property. Mr. Armistead demolished the Charlton-Morrison structure and built his Victorian-style residence on the former building's foundations. For decades, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation tried in vain to buy the property. It was not until 1994 that the Armistead family finally agreed to lease the site to the Foundation on the condition that it accept the house as a gift and relocate it to another location in town. In preparation for the move, architectural historians performed dendrochronology studies on the house's wood members. The results revealed that over 100 framing and woodwork pieces were cut in 1749. Mr. Armistead, therefore, recycled wood members from the Charlton-Morrison structure when building his Victorian-style home. Many of these wood pieces were removed from the Armistead House and reused in the 2009 reconstruction of the Charlton Coffeehouse, but some original framing members still remain in the Armistead House, which was moved to North Henry Street in 1995. So, the Morrison House never actually went away. It survives in both the reconstructed Charlton Coffeehouse and the Armistead House!

Above: 1920s image looking west from present Capitol site. Armistead House on right and Vest House on left.

Left: Armistead House move (images from www.dhr.virginia.gov)