

**The Legacy of Stones River:
Remembering the Civil War**

**A Symposium in Murfreesboro, TN
March 31, 2007**

Summaries of Speakers' Presentations

Miranda L. Fraley, Tennessee State Museum

Jim Lewis, Stones River National Battlefield

“Remembering Stones River: From Burying Ground to National Battlefield”

Jim Lewis and Miranda Fraley reviewed the early years of the National Cemetery (created in 1864) at the site of the Battle of Stones River. The National Cemetery was established for Union soldiers and veterans; there was no place set aside for the Confederate dead. Lewis and Fraley pointed out how the National Cemetery became an important meeting ground for local white and African American Union veterans and supporters on Memorial Day each year. In 1892, a rostrum was erected in the cemetery for speakers to use at these events; it was later destroyed as a war measure in 1942 but has recently been reconstructed. The two historians also discussed the formation near the battlefield of an African American community, called Cemetery, made up largely of former slaves.

Lewis and Fraley described efforts of local Confederates to establish a central location to bury and mourn their dead. The Murfreesboro Memorial Association, which was the brainchild of local women, purchased land in 1867 for a cemetery for the Confederate dead. A culture of mourning developed to pay respect to the dead and to commiserate over the demise of the Confederacy. Late in the 1880s, the local Confederate dead were moved to Murfreesboro's main cemetery, Evergreen.

Lewis and Fraley concluded by talking about the development of the national battlefield at Stones River. A group of Union and Confederate veterans in 1896 began an effort to create a national battlefield at the site and in 1897 presented a proposal asking Congress to set aside 3000 acres for the park. This proposal failed, but the veterans did put up some interpretive signs (including one, apparently, in the cemetery). Efforts to create a national battlefield succeeded on March 3, 1927, when Congress authorized the acquisition of 325 acres for the park. A Confederate veteran raised the U.S. flag at the Stones River National Battlefield's opening ceremony, demonstrating the reconciliation that had taken place over the years.

Karen L. Cox
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
“Honoring the Generation of the Sixties: Women’s Role in Vindicating the Confederacy”

Karen Cox discussed the significant influence that the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) has had on Civil War memory since the organization’s founding in 1894. She traced the UDC’s history as its focus evolved from mourning to celebration and commemoration to vindication of the Confederacy. The rise of the UDC paralleled the development of a culture of reconciliation between the North and the South in the United States as the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth.

Cox pointed out several reasons for the UDC’s success. The organization attracted a mix of generations and a corps of elite women leaders, including Caroline Meriwether Goodlett of Nashville, one of the group’s founders, and Rassie White of Paris, TN, a key force behind the UDC monument at the Shiloh battlefield. The UDC’s leaders proved to be both strong organizers and excellent fundraisers. Cox demonstrated that these UDC women were political activists when it came to Confederate memory, as they publicly worked for their cause by lobbying legislators and local governments; despite this activity, the women continued to think of themselves as traditional, non-public women who were fulfilling traditional roles.

Cox identified five primary objectives of the UDC: memorial efforts, historical contributions, educational outreach, benevolent causes, and social activities. According to Cox, the most significant of these was the UDC’s role in educating children and connecting the future and past generations. Through written histories and other educational materials designed for the classroom, the UDC promoted several key interpretations of the Civil War and the antebellum South: the war was fought over states’ rights, not slavery; Confederate veterans were heroes; southern women were heroines; slavery was a benevolent institution, and many slaves were faithful to their owners during the war; Reconstruction was a travesty; and the founders of the Ku Klux Klan were heroes who redeemed the South from Reconstruction policies. The UDC’s vision of the Civil War, also known as the “Lost Cause” interpretation of the war, was tremendously influential throughout the U.S., particularly in the South, for much of the twentieth century.

One of the key points that Cox made was that the UDC emphasized the importance of women’s roles in supporting the Confederacy and its soldiers. The organization was instrumental in promoting the construction of group homes for needy Confederate women, as well as homes for veterans.

William A. Blair
Pennsylvania State University
“The Politics of Commemorating the Civil War”

William Blair discussed the politics of commemoration after the war. He pointed out how commemoration in the South was complicated by the fact that the end of the war had brought defeat for Confederates and victory for former slaves, who finally gained their freedom. Thus, there were two Civil Wars commemorated in the South.

Blair emphasized that the sectional wounds of the Civil War remained deep for many years. He took the audience back to the months following the defeat of the Confederacy and described how Northerners wanted to be sure that former Confederates were actually going to accept their defeat. In 1865-1866, Northerners were wary lest their former foes had any fighting spirit left. U.S. occupation forces viewed Confederate memorial parades suspiciously and placed restrictions on them, forbidding participants to wear military uniforms, for example.

At the same time, former slaves were holding Emancipation Day celebrations to mark their freedom. These celebrations usually featured parades that included U.S. Colored Troops veterans and martial music (which was resented by Confederate veterans prohibited from making similar military displays). The events also usually included speeches by prominent orators, songs, prayers, and refreshments. Emancipation Day celebrations attracted huge crowds into the twentieth century. Black and white Unionists in the South also celebrated the nation's Memorial Day, which was shunned by most whites who had supported the Confederacy. Blair demonstrated how both Emancipation Day celebrations and Memorial Day events often served as political rallies for the Republican Party.

Former Confederates and their supporters celebrated their own Memorial, or Decoration, Day. These attracted Democratic politicians and their supporters. Blair emphasized the significant role of southern women in spearheading these memorial events through ladies' memorial associations. Women did most of the planning and fundraising and then men carried out the more public roles of delivering speeches and participating in parades. Editors of Northern newspapers accused the ladies' memorial associations of providing a cover in the form of mourning for what was really ongoing “guerilla warfare” against the occupation of U.S. forces and the extension of civil rights to former slaves. According to Blair, Confederate veterans essentially agreed that this interpretation was accurate.

As Blair made clear, sectional resentment in the years after the war also developed as a result of the exclusion of Confederate remains from national cemeteries. Both Union and Confederate dead were originally to be included in the national cemetery at Antietam, but the Grand Army of the Republic, the Union veterans' organization, protested. Former Confederates in turn chafed at having to support national cemeteries that did not include the remains of their own people.

Blair concluded by demonstrating how the issue of caring for the Confederate dead became a prominent element in the sectional reconciliation that took place during the 1890s. As tensions with Spain escalated into the Spanish American War, the federal government deliberately tried to forge reconciliation. As part of that effort, President William McKinley promised that the government would begin tending to Confederate graves.