



COUNCIL ON AMERICA'S MILITARY PAST - U.S.A.

PRESERVING, INTERPRETING AND SHARING OUR MILITARY HERITAGE

presents

The Persistent Pandemic Preservationist December 2021

Editor's Note:

Welcome! This is Volume II, Number 6 of a now-three times per year newsletter featuring historic sites across the country responding to the challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The intent is to stay in touch with old and new members, and to share information that is interesting and useful, in the hope that we will create a community of practice among those preserving the nation's military past. Each issue will focus on one or more sites. The original Persistent Preservationist was a most excellent newsletter produced by CAMP member Col. Hal Youmans, USA (Ret).

This issue features the National Museum of Civil War Medicine, a Maryland site that has proven to be uniquely relevant. Our thanks to the staff of the Museum for the important work that they are doing and the wonderful welcome we received when visiting and researching this story.

Happy and Healthy New Year, everyone! — Nick Reynolds, Editor

Still Relevant: The Story of Civil War Medicine

The Persistent Pandemic Preservationist had hoped that he could become a mere pandemic preservationist, but sadly it looks like he will remain a PPP for at least a little while longer. That's the bad news. The good news is that there are still interesting things to do, and do safely, during the pandemic. In this column, I have become accustomed to telling readers how the Pandemic has challenged the museums and sites that we are used to visiting. We are glad to report that this is one museum that has not only pivoted successfully but emerged stronger than ever.

Less than an hour away from Washington, DC is Frederick, Maryland, a location that some of us visited for CAMP's 50th anniversary conference in 2016. It is the home of the National Museum of Civil War Medicine (NMCWM), built around a collection started in 1971 by CAMP member Dr. Gordon Dammann. Wife and veteran CAMPer Becky and I recently visited to see how they were doing.

We went on a Monday, when the museum is open only by appointment, and had an excellent guide, Membership Coordinator Kyle Dalton, an expert in both the big and little things that make the NMCWM so strong. Kyle told us that, while the museum was closed for a while during the pandemic, its membership had grown by over 100% over the past two years. He explained that this occurred on account of the subject matter — medical history during a Pandemic — as well as the fact that it treats another time when Americans were deeply divided. The issue of treating enemy wounded offers a poignant lesson: for the first part of the Civil War, both sides treated their own wounded first but then tended to any nearby enemy wounded. After the killing of black US soldiers by Nathan Bedford Forrest's Confederates at Ft. Pillow in 1864 — which historians now generally consider to have been a massacre — the atmosphere was less forgiving on both sides, and mercy to the enemy became a rare commodity.

Due to the battles fought in the vicinity, Frederick became a medical center during the war — in effect, the city turned into one large hospital. The museum's main campus is suitably located in the older part of town, conveniently near the library and a large parking garage. Its three-story tan brick building was once home to a furniture and undertaking business, which seems all too fitting. The medical instruments themselves are interesting enough; the immersive exhibits put them in context and almost bring them to life. We learned about the state of medicine at the time, the ways in which it advanced on account of the war, the main threats to soldiers on both sides — which, not surprisingly, came more from disease than from battle. The exhibits include one on caring for wounded on the battlefield, another on moving wounded by purpose-built wagons and railway cars, and sick call at a Union encampment. A final exhibit on modern military medicine is testimony to the museum's determination not just to take us back to the 1860s but to carry the story forward.



Above: One of the immersive exhibits, and a staff member involving the young generation of Civil War students.

Members all over the world can access the museum's resources remotely — to include digital tours, interactive virtual field trips, expert speakers, and podcasts, not to mention its publications. The Museum's bookstore is a carefully curated collection not only on Civil War but also on more general medical history. Visitors within driving distance can not only visit the museum but also take walking tours of Frederick. The NMCWM is tied to three other sites at Antietam, Gettysburg, and downtown DC — where Clara Barton opened and ran an office to track missing soldiers. She knew that the effect of the war on families did not end when the guns fell silent — and that no one else was doing the job. One visitor's comment about Barton's office applies to all of the properties: to stand in her space and feel her presence — and that of the men and their families she cared for — is worth the trip.

CAMP is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization whose members are interested in the identification, restoration, preservation, and memorialization of old military installations as well as their history and traditions. All persons sharing these interests are invited to join. CAMP publishes an academic journal (The Journal of America's Military Past) and a newsletter on recent developments in historic preservation (Headquarters Heliogram), and holds an annual conference. Find out more at: www.campjamp.org.