

Southern, or just Southern Md.?

Some are proud of Confederate leanings of region

Friday, July 3, 2009

Maryland is south of the Mason-Dixon line, the traditional dividing line between Northern and Southern states. Yet the state, largely because of a strong Union Army presence, never seceded during the Civil War.

While Maryland never joined the Confederacy, the memory of the Civil War lives on in more than just textbooks for some Southern Marylanders, as does the memory of the humiliation that followed the Confederacy's defeat.



Click [here](#) to enlarge this photo

Staff photo by REID SILVERMAN

Jim Dunbar stands in front of the Confederate memorial park near Point Lookout. Dunbar says the park's purpose is to honor the prisoners of war who died at the Union prison camp during the Civil War.

Looking back

Connie Dunbar exemplifies the fabled "Southern hospitality," graciously pressing chilled cantaloupe and cold beers on her visitors. Recently she spent the day with her husband, Jim, in Scotland putting the finishing touches on a memorial to Confederate dead.

Jim Dunbar is one of the leaders of Descendants of Point Lookout, whose members claim ancestors who were among the 52,300 Confederate soldiers — and a few hundred civilians — who were imprisoned in southern St. Mary's at the prisoner of war camp, one of the Civil War's largest. Thousands died in the camp of disease and starvation.

 [E-Mail This Article](#) |  [Print This Story](#)

A1 EXCAVATING & SEPTIC SYSTEMS, LLC

SPECIALIZING IN SEPTIC SYSTEMS

MEETING ALL OF YOUR EXCAVATING NEEDS! Installation, Maintenance & Repair



- Septic Tanks
- Drain Fields
- Perc Test
- Service & Repair
- Septic Pump & Alarm Service



- Septic Certification
- Septic Tank Pump Outs
- Video Drain Field and Pipe Inspection
- High Pressure Drain Field and Pipe Jetting

Proudly Serving Southern Maryland

443-532-6706 • 443-532-6702

Locally Owned & Operated • Over 30 Years Experience

Licensed, Bonded & Insured

Military and Senior Discounts

www.a1excavatingandseptics.com



Southern, or just Southern Md.?

STAFF PHOTO.

Dunbar, of La Plata, said the group decided to construct its own memorial after being excluded from events at the adjoining cemetery for Confederate veterans and at Point Lookout State Park, the actual site of the camp.

For the past four or five years the group has been slowly building the memorial, a stone obelisk topped by a statue and ringed by the flags of the Confederate states. The 3.2-acre site is "still a work in progress" but almost done, Dunbar said.



Click [here](#) to enlarge this photo

Staff photo by DARWIN WEIGEL

Rob Long, left, Ed Thompson, Chris McCall, James Couch and Larry Messick, all of Lusby, pose around the gravestone of Confederate veteran Somervell Sollers at Middleham Chapel in Lusby. Sollers, who lived in Calvert County, fought with the 2nd Maryland Infantry and died at 83 in 1920. They all are members of Sons of Confederate Veterans and have relatives who fought in the Civil War. Their local SCV camp is the Capt. Vincent Camalier Camp based in Leonardtown.

Dunbar insists the history of the Civil War has been systematically revised to suppress the true causes of the war, as well as Maryland's sympathies in the conflict.

"Most people think Maryland was a Northern state, but Maryland was under occupation. Maryland was part of the Union like Czechoslovakia was part of the Third Reich. We were under military occupation," Dunbar said.

Likewise, Dunbar said, Southern states rebelled not because their residents wanted to keep slaves but because they were concerned over taxation and the expansion of federal power. Similarly, the war did not do much to free the slaves, he said.

"If you look at history, slavery would have died on its own. It runs its course just like a fever," said Bob Koble of Mechanicsville, another member of the Descendants of Point Lookout who was helping finish up the work. He also claimed that slavery was more humane than modern historians portray.

"A slave was their property. Why would they abuse them?" he said of the planter class. "There were some bad people, same as everywhere. But, most slaves got the same treatment the family got. Why would they want to abuse them? That was their labor, and they weren't going to get any more."

At its root, Koble thinks there's too much ideology in discussions of the Civil War.

"People try to make more out of it than it was. Get over it. It's 150 years ago. I wish people would grow up," he said.

Charles Holden, an associate professor of history at St. Mary's College of Maryland, said there is no question that slavery was the crucial motivation for the Civil War. "Enormously so," Holden said. "It's not a bone of contention among historians, I can tell you that. My response to the states' rights argument is: States' rights to do what? You go back, you quickly get an answer to that question, and you come back to slavery again. Slavery informed so much of the Old South's religious, cultural and economic views, whether you were a slave owner or not. It really shaped the entire white Southern society."

While most white Southerners did not own slaves, many of them aspired to, he said. "Why would so many white non-slaveholders pick up a gun? Because they saw their future as being slaveholders," he said.

The Descendants' monument resembles two smaller ones at the neighboring cemetery, where graves are unmarked, bearing the names of many of those who succumbed to starvation, exposure and disease at Point Lookout. At the back of the cemetery, behind a wrought iron fence and almost obscured by the trees, a Confederate battle flag hung limply recently in the June heat.

Longing for the 'good old days'

Members of a Leonardtown-based camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Capt

Southern, or just Southern Md.?

Members of a Leonardtown-based camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, Capt. Vincent Camalier Camp 1359, do local works of philanthropy, like cleaning roadways and restoring graveyards, but the heart of their mission is attempting to preserve a way of life they fear will disappear.

The decline of agriculture, especially tobacco farming, in Southern Maryland is only one of the factors that threaten the region's status as a "Southern" place, but it might be one of the largest, they say.

Historically, the region's economy was "primarily farming and living off the water. ... Calvert County has a tobacco leaf on the flag, as long as it's politically correct. I think it'll change," said Lennie Thompson of Loveville.

"I think we're losing our identity," said Lusby resident Rob Long.

Another member, Ed Thompson of Lusby, was not quite as nostalgic.

"It's important to remember, but I'm glad I'm not working in tobacco," he said. Other members, remembering working family farms as children, did not disagree.

For the Sons of Confederate Veterans, honoring the past also means honoring the Confederate flag, a tricky task when many others see it as an emblem of slavery and racial oppression. Lennie Thompson said opposition to the flag stems from "its association with hatred," but that association is incorrect.

"Other groups hijacked it, done something other with it than what it was originally supposed to be," agreed Larry Messick of Lusby.

Southern traditions

For Camp Commander Chris McCall there is no doubt that this region is fundamentally a Southern society.

"I'm from South Carolina but I think Southern Maryland is more 'Southern' than where I came from," he said. "The lower part of the state, Waldorf and below, is Southern compared to where I came from. To me, Southern heritage is based on God, based on patriotism, based on friends, based on family."

"I think it's based on traditions," Long added.

All they want, they say, is for Confederates' stories to be told. "Only one side is being told. We want the whole story being told. To me, I think there's two sides to every story and somewhere in the middle is the right, but tell both sides," McCall said.

Long is currently finishing a book, "Valor in a Border State," describing the roles of Marylanders in the Confederacy. He was dismayed when his fourth-grade daughter recently returned from a field trip to Maryland's first capital, St. Mary's City, only to declare it "boring."

"Still, she's young," another member reassured him.

More upsetting to Long was what he saw as a slanted presentation of the history of the state. "I had to sit down with her afterwards. I was appalled. It was totally anti-Southern, it was that one-sided. That's what they teach kids now," he said.

Later, finished with softball practice, the girl wandered into the pavilion where the camp had gathered.

"What did you learn at St. Mary's City?" Lennie Thompson asked teasingly.

"Nothing about what you guys talk about," she replied.

Sweet home Maryland

Georgia Ladd, a promoter of Southern culture, uses "Sweet Home Alabama," the Southern rock anthem by Lynyrd Skynyrd, as her cell phone ringtone but has deep

Maryland roots. The Shadyside resident said, "I really feel compelled to tell the story of the Maryland Confederate soldier. That is a story that is not told."

Ladd, a member of the Col. Richard Thomas Zarvona chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, believes the South has a distinctive culture, though it's more complex than that. For instance, its Maryland incarnation bears little resemblance to "Gone With the Wind."

"When you think of Maryland's Southern culture, you don't really have the idea of a big huge plantation with white columns," Ladd said. "It's not so much 'Southern culture,' as 'This is my land, my property.' My family has been here for hundreds of years and that's kind of the way we like it. It's a patriarchal society; I'm not going to deny that, it's very traditional. I come from a line of teachers and the reason I'm a teacher is my grandmother was and my great-grandmother was. Things don't change much. It's very patriarchal still, but I wouldn't have it any other way. I really wouldn't."

Ladd boasts 16 generations of Maryland ancestors and descends from planter families. She is proud of a version of Southern culture preserved in family lore. Her forebears treated slaves well, she said, clothing them lavishly and allowing them to earn some money for themselves.

"My great-grandfather was working right alongside with his slaves in the tobacco. It's not like the big 'massa' sitting on the back porch watching slaves work in the field. He was right there along with them," Ladd said. "You're not going to find the slaves in threadbare linen pants and things, in chains. The Chaney family was sending their slaves to the market in velvet coats."

Furthermore, Ladd said, the agricultural basis of the Southern economy demanded slavery, at least for a while.

"Slavery was necessary for them to make a profit on their cash crop. It kind of went hand in hand: slavery, a cash crop and states' rights," she said, while attempts by the federal government to intervene were illegal meddling in the affairs of independent states.

"A modern example would be, 'Take the stimulus money. We'll cram it down your throats ...'" she said.

Can't we all just get along?

Louise Webb, vice president of the African-American Heritage Society in La Plata, sees no reason modern-day Yankees and Rebels can't just get along.

Webb recalled help from Charles County members of the Sons of Confederate Veterans last year in providing a headstone for Cpl. George Brown, a black Union soldier who survived the war.

"I know a lot of people say, 'I'm not going to talk to them, socialize with them, because they are Confederates.' I say, 'I need to understand this,' and just recently I'm telling everyone because I thought it [the headstone ceremony] was the most beautiful thing," Webb said.

She said she has no problem with seeing the Confederate flag flown for historical reasons.

"I don't understand why they can't fly that flag," she said. "Now I think they're more understanding. Some people have things embedded in their minds and they don't change. A lot of times people hear someone say something and they'll go along with that."

Webb's experience also challenges stereotypical images of the South. Despite growing up in Bryans Road during segregation, Webb said her family was friendly with its white neighbors.

"I didn't grow up with hatred. No, no. ... My grandfather was a farmer and we all shared," she said. "We were very fortunate, so he shared with the neighbors. We ate

together. Their uncles came to our house and slept together on the floor. We didn't have no problems, but people think we had problems. We walked to school together, but because it was segregation we went to different schools. I said, 'This is the way it is.' Now I say, 'That's the way it was.' What could you do? You didn't know. Back when there was segregation you thought that was how it was supposed to be."

William Braxton, president of the NAACP Charles County branch, has a less rosy view of Southern Maryland's race relations, and believes the border state has fallen behind the South in racial integration.

For instance, he said local restaurants often won't have black servers, though many black people might work in the kitchen, out of sight. Likewise, Braxton wants to see more black police officers.

"With the population we have, you should see African-Americans rolling around in these squad cars, and when you have a meeting you need to see African-Americans sitting across the table from you along with the sheriff," he said. "We have a ways to go."

In discussing the Civil War, Braxton is less concerned with slavery than with securing recognition for black soldiers who fought on both sides and who, he thinks, have been overlooked.

"You have to recognize both sides, and I'm saying they're not recognized at all on either side. There's a lot of history there that's never been told," Braxton said.

In St. Mary's County, The Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions in partnership with the Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War has embarked on a campaign to raise funds and awareness and educate the community about the contributions of African-American Union soldiers and build a memorial in Lexington Park to United States "colored troops" who served during the Civil War. Some newly freed slaves in St. Mary's County enlisted in the Union Army.

The monument will include a tribute to Sgt. James H. Harris and Pvt. William H. Barnes, who earned the Congressional Medal of Honor. Barnes fought in the Battle of Chaffin's Farm, Va., and Harris fought in the Battle of New Market Heights, Va. The goal is to raise \$200,000 in cash contributions, grants and in-kind donations to complete the monument by Sept. 29, 2010, to mark the 146th anniversary date of the battles where St. Mary's countians Barnes and Harris earned their Medals of Honor.

emitrano@somdnews.com

Never the twain shall meet?

Southern identity is prized by many living south of the Mason-Dixon Line and modern-day Yankees might look down their noses at their Southern fellow citizens, but differences between the two populations may be more perceived than real, according to Ted Ownby, director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi.

According to Ownby, Northern prejudices against the South persist today, rooted in apparent ignorance of how residents of the American South actually live.

"I have students at the University of Mississippi who are amazed to go to other parts of the country and people ask them, apparently seriously, 'Do you wear shoes?'" he said. The students "seem a bit surprised when black-and-white news footage from the 1960s is the first thing apparently on the minds of people they talk to."

But Northerners seem both wary of and fascinated by the South, Ownby said, curious about issues of "race, poverty, backwardness, notions of poor education, but a lot of those students, people from what we call the South who travel, become objects of fascination: the way they talk, what they talk about. If they want to tell stories about wrestling alligators, if they want to fit into stereotypes, they find there are always people ready to half-believe the tales. [It's] not always a stigma but a way to be a life of the party."

Despite the perceived gulf, Ownby sees more similarities between the cultures of the

Southern, or just Southern Md.?

Despite the perceived gap, Cowley sees more similarities between the cultures of the North and South.

"I tend to think that 'Southern hospitality' or neighborliness, mannerliness, those are not things that people have or don't have; there's a range of ways people deal with each other," he said. "I'm not sure where the term Southern hospitality came from. I'm a little suspicious of it as effectively describing the way people treat each other, but I'm happy to believe that it means something to a lot of people. It's a part of Southern identity and distinctiveness, the notion of welcoming people and feeding them and large extended families. That part of hospitality, I'm willing to think that's part of an agricultural background that you can find a lot of in the South."

Joyce Bennett, vice chairwoman of the Maryland League of the South and a resident of Clements, agreed that the South is looked down upon but thinks differences between the old Union states and Dixie are real.

"I think Southern folks — and I hope I don't offend anybody — but they're more polite," she said. "I think in general, they're slower-paced and I think that's misunderstood often. I think they are more thoughtful. I find that folks in the North tend to speak and think very rapidly, [while] folks in the South tend to be more thoughtful and deliberative, I'd say. So I think manners and hospitality are really valued in Southern culture; so if someone shows up at your door and you don't have quite enough for an extra person at supper, you stretch it out with an extra biscuit or cook more potatoes. The idea of hospitality is you never make a guest feel uncomfortable."