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Richard Kirkland Documentary Premieres In Fredericksburg

By Scott C. Boyd

FREDERICKSBURG, Va. – The movie “The Angel of Marye’s Heights” premiered on July 24 in the city where its hero, Richard Kirkland, earned that nickname during the Battle of Fredericksburg on Dec. 13, 1862.

The 30-minute documentary, full of dramatic scenes from the Kirkland’s life, played to a standing-room-only crowd of 200+ at the theater in the Central Rappahannock Regional Library’s downtown branch.

“When was the last time Fredericksburg had a world premiere of a film?” master-of-ceremonies Terry Thomann asked the crowd before the film began. “This is fantastic!”

Thomann is director of the National Civil War Life Museum and Foundation in Fredericksburg and a sponsor of the film.

Following the standing ovation at the end, the movie’s two principals, director Clint Ross and co-producer Michael Aubrecht, spoke about the project behind the film.

Ross traced the genesis of the film idea back to a magazine article he read eight years earlier about Kirkland, a sergeant in Co. G of the 2nd South Carolina Infantry Regiment.

After the horrific slaughter by the Confederates of Union troops assaulting the stone wall along Sunken Road at the foot of Marye’s Heights ended, Kirkland took pity on the enemy wounded he heard crying out in pain as they lay cut down in front of the wall. He risked his life to carry water to comfort the wounded men.

The film served as Ross’ thesis for his master’s degree in film and television from the Savannah College of Art and Design. For the short story film students were required to create, Ross said that he harkened back to the story of Richard Kirkland.

He originally proposed the film as a narrative, but his faculty advisors suggested that he do it as a documentary, and he took their advice. It took Ross and a group of collaborators 18 months to create. In addition to his directorial duties, he portrayed Kirkland as an adult.

His first collaborator was historian and writer Michael Aubrecht. When he Googled Richard Kirkland, Aubrecht’s name came up first. Ross said he was “blown away by Michael’s skill as a wordsmith.”

In thanking everyone and dedicating the film back to them, Ross said, “It is my prayer that



The cast of “The Angel of Marye’s Heights” at the premiere are, from left: Clint Ross, Donald Pfanz, Richard Warren II, John Cummings, Megan Hicks and Michael Aubrecht. (Kathleen Warren photo)

this film honor my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the message that it carries.”

“Kirkland wasn’t born a hero. He was a simple Southern boy from Camden, S.C., who fought in a war and fought in a horrific battle and came to a point where he made a decision that somebody else’s life was more important than his own,” Ross said.

“This film is really a tribute to the common citizen willing to take a risk for something that is greater than themselves,” Ross concluded.

Aubrecht told a tale about how the movie’s “bible” or “playbook” containing all the most minute details about the film was accidentally left behind at a shooting location after the film crew headed to the next site.

A man who remained anonymous found the binder, called the cell phone number he found inside and before long it was back with the production crew.

“That guy’s pretty much responsible for this entire film being completed,” Aubrecht said. “We’re going to have to add ‘The Binder Guy’ in quotes at the bottom of the credits because his contribution was second to none.”

The audience included many of the people associated with the film who had on-screen roles, like Fredericksburg National Park Service historian Don Pfanz, storyteller Megan Hicks, historian John Cummings and Richard Warren II, who portrayed Kirkland as a young boy.

Richard’s parents attended with their son. “It’s very exciting and makes us very proud and

thankful that he wanted to be a part of that,” his father, Rick Warren, said.

Kathleen Warren said young Richard’s involvement began with a homeschool project where he made a video of himself portraying Kirkland.

“Since I got the information on Kirkland from Mike Aubrecht, I sent him a copy of the video and he loved it,” Kathleen said. Aubrecht suggested she post the video on YouTube, which led to Ross seeing it and wanting to include young Richard in the film.

“It was a big thrill,” according to Richard who said he would like to do more acting.

“I was really amazed,” Cummings said. “The Lord has blessed us. We had a full room. It’s a fantastic product — a great story to tell as well.”

Although he has been in documentaries before, this film was “the first one I’ve been in as a ‘talking head’ to that length,” Cummings said.

“Our motto for our museum is, ‘We drank from the same canteen,’” Thomann said. “What better way of illustrating that motto than the story of Richard Kirkland.”

The movie is shown daily at the National Civil War Life Museum at 829 Caroline St. in downtown Fredericksburg. Hours are 10-5 Monday-Saturday and 12-5 Sunday. The admission of \$5 for adults and \$2.50 for children includes the movie. For information, (540) 834-1859, www.civilwarlife.org, www.theangelmovie.com/