

RECRUITING DAY: Today, 1–4 p.m., Fort Ward Museum and Historic Site, 4301 West Braddock Road., Alexandria. Visitors can learn about how what is involved in becoming a military or civilian Civil War re-enactor and how to join a local re-enactment unit. Free admission. 703/746-4848; fortward.org.

THE REST OF THE STORY

EVERY YEAR, thousands of tourists travel to Fredericksburg to learn about one of the most one-sided battles of the entire Civil War. During their stay, they will likely walk Sunken Road, trace the stone wall and stand in the shadow of the Kirkland Monument. They may also climb to the top of Marye's Heights and pay their respects at Fredericksburg National Cemetery.



CIVIL WAR CORNER >>

MICHAEL AUBRECHT

Most will visit the exhibits at the visitor center, and many will take at least one tour given by our renowned National Park Service staff. All will leave with a better sense of the bloodshed that occurred here in December of 1862.

For them, the story of the Battle of Fredericksburg ends at the conclusion of the fighting. However, for every engagement that took place during the War Between the States, there was far more to the story than the actual combat. The story of the suffering that took place beyond the battlefield is often forgotten.

This is the very subject of painter Mort Künstler's latest release, "The Angel of the Battlefield." In it, the artist's brush has captured a vision that depicts the aftermath of the Battle of Fredericksburg.

The main character in the scene is a volunteer nurse who was determined to ease the suffering of wounded soldiers everywhere. Her name was Clara Barton, and today she remains one of the most famous women in American history.

Barton was here in Fredericksburg in December 1862, when the armies of the North and South clashed for days, leaving behind thousands of blue- and gray-uniformed casualties who were too injured or exhausted to move. After the fighting ended, Barton traveled into the crumbling city to assist with Federal troops who



KING JAMES GALLERIES OF WINCHESTER

Artist Mort Künstler will be in Fredericksburg next Saturday to sign prints of his latest release, 'The Angel of the Battlefield,' which depicts nurse Clara Barton tending to the wounded at Chatham in December 1862.

were being tended to in makeshift hospitals all over town.

After assisting surgeons in the battered churches, she went back across the river to the Lacy House, also known as Chatham. Located atop a bluff called Stafford Heights, the estate overlooked the city of Fredericksburg and had been used as the Union army headquarters prior to the battle.

Now it was a hospital and, by her estimate, Barton recalled that there were no fewer than 1,200 men crowded into the rooms of the mansion, with more rows of men stationed outside on the cold, hard ground.

Lying among this sea of bloody blue uniforms were a number of gray-clad wounded in need. One rebel, Capt. Thurman Thomas of the 13th Mississippi Volunteers, was caught behind enemy lines, but was grateful for the mercy he received. Barton treated the wounded Confederate with the same care and concern that she employed with her own "boys." Her act of charity for Thomas and his companions echoed the sentiment that true compassion drew no political distinction.

For the next two weeks Barton stayed at Chatham, where she saw

PRINT SIGNING

What: Print signing by artist Mort Künstler

When: Saturday March 20, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Where: Fredericksburg VFW (2701 Princess Anne St.)

Information: King James Galleries of Winchester 888/217-1865

"hundreds of the worst wounded men I have ever seen." Many were placed on blankets in the muddy yard, where they shivered in the cold winter air, waiting for someone inside to die.

Throughout the remainder of the war she routinely helped soldiers from both sides, and those who survived regarded her as their savior.

According to the National Park Service, Clara Barton never forgot what she witnessed at Chatham. The survivors would not likely forget Barton's kindness and service, which were often delivered under dangerous conditions.

She expressed her dedication to duty in a letter written to her cousin Vira on the eve of the Battle of Fredericksburg. In it she wrote: "Already the roll of the moving artillery is sounded in my ears. The battle draws near and I must catch one hour's sleep for tomorrow's labor."

Those familiar with Künstler's work know that Fredericksburg has been a staple in his catalog for years. This marks the 14th Künstler canvas to feature the area, although this painting is the first of his to depict both Clara Barton and Chatham.

Last year Künstler traveled to the estate for the first time and was touched by the story of the elegant mansion turned infirmary. In an interview with me, he commented on the legacy of the Lacy House: "The visitors list itself is awesome," Künstler said. "It is the only building ever visited by George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. And don't forget the Virginians who visited, like Thomas Jefferson and Robert E. Lee."

He added: "What intrigued me, as an idea for a painting, was that after the Battle of Fredericksburg, this beautiful building was used as a field hospital, and that both Clara Barton and Walt Whitman were there at the same time! What an opportunity—to paint the icons of American nursing and of American literature."

Perhaps what makes "The Angel of the Battlefield" so special is that its scene may have come at the end of the battle, but also at the beginning of a legacy that remains to this day. Beyond the courage and compassion that she showed near the Fredericksburg battlefield, Clara Barton's greatest feat was still to come, the founding of the American Red Cross.

Künstler himself summed up his intent with this latest endeavor when he said, "I hope this painting passes on to the viewer the emotions that I felt while painting it and is accepted as my personal tribute to Clara Barton, the American Red Cross and the entire nursing profession."

Michael Aubrecht is a Fredericksburg-area historian. Visit his blog at pinstripe.press.net/PPBlog.