



Fort Defiance and *Ben and the Virtues*: The rewards of vision and persistence

Jim Clemmer

In this issue

Fort Defiance and Ben and the Virtues 1
Jim Clemmer

(Gallery) *Opening day at Fort Defiance* 3

Thinking About Japan 4
Aleeta Christian

APSURA honors Gerald Beavers at annual meeting 5

(Review) *1861: The Civil War Awakening* 6
Richard Gildrie

(Poem) *In My Craft: A Sullen Bark* 6
Gerry Tatham

(Poem) *Spare Parts* 7
Gerry Tatham

From the President 7
Al Bekus

Application form 8

Ben and the Virtues photos courtesy Calli Smith, www.callismithphotography.com

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Vision and persistence per se are not among the 13 virtues Benjamin Franklin advocates in his *Autobiography*. But both are surely among the qualities that guided Richard Gildrie, Howard Winn, Phil Kemmerly and George Mabry as they set sail on the journeys that led to April's grand opening of the Fort Defiance Civil War Park and the elegant staging of the musical play *Ben and the Virtues*.

Of the hundreds ultimately involved in these endeavors, Gildrie in particular played a central role in both. It was Richard who along with Winn and Kemmerly in the early 1980s conceived the idea of preserving Fort Defiance as a living history lesson and convinced others of the worth of the project. And it was Richard who a bit later became incensed enough at the standard image of Ben Franklin as a stuffy and over-stuffed statesman and moralist to write a play presenting Franklin as a far livelier and more engaging fellow.

It is especially remarkable given the many twists and turns taken by the sepa-

rate paths of these projects that both came to fruition not merely in the same year, but in the same week. The Fort Defiance Civil War Park was opened to the public on April 9, and *Ben and the Virtues* debuted at APSU on April 14.

Scrambling through underbrush and fighting chiggers must be far down the to-do lists of most historians, yet that is the way Gildrie and Winn answered the curiosity of Judge Sam Boaz about the worth of the abrupt mounds and depressions on his hill-top by the river. They and Kemmerly soon learned that these efforts of Confederate soldiers to defend the town had been largely protected from erosion by the same

Ben and the Virtues, music and lyrics by George L. Mabry, book by Richard Gildrie, was performed by the APSU Opera Theatre April 15-17 in the Music/Mass Communication Building Concert Hall, APSU.

The cast was comprised of approximately 20 musicians and actors including students and faculty; the production staff numbered approximately 30, and the orchestra was comprised of 24 musicians plus Greg Wolyneec as conductor.

This production was one of the final events in a yearlong celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Center of Excellence for the Creative Arts.

Fort Defiance gallery clockwise from top-left: View of downtown from Interpretive Center; two of many re-enactors; period tents and costumes setting the scene; cannon, Interpretive Center, uniform display; the earthworks; band Red River Breeze.

Fort Defiance photos by Jim Clemmer

dense growth that gave them such trouble, and that they were indeed worth preserving and exhibiting.

By the early 2000s they had convinced Clarksville mayor Johnny Piper to form a commission and to seek a federal grant to begin the work that was to culminate in the Fort Defiance park. Opening day was a festival of music, gunfire between Civil War re-enactors, sermons reminding visitors of the early days of the local Greenhill church, displays of War-era relics and costumes, and tours of the earthworks and the modern interpretive center.

Also early in his career Gildrie began to see a similar font of unexplored meaning in the life and works of Benjamin Franklin. From his study of Franklin's *Autobiography* especially he came to believe that the textbook image of Franklin missed by a mile the mischievous, fun-loving and ironic side of the man. So he wrote a restoration-style play based on the young man Franklin describes in the first part of his *Autobiography*, a youngster perhaps seeking a life of moral perfection guided by reason, but also seeking some fun. The play demoted the standard image of the moralizing statesman and seer to the role of understudy.

Gildrie's Franklin is not Poor Richard, whom he sets to the side as a kind of satirical obligato, but the drinker and the swimmer, constantly delighting his friends and ladies with fantastic intellectual and comedic stunts performed in the malleable social medium of Phila-

delphia's Tun Tavern and environs.

As staged at the Roxy in 2002, the play lacked something, which Richard's wife Meredith suggested might be music. So Richard cajoled his old friend George Mabry into writing a couple of tunes for the show.

Mabry soon warmed to the project, and over the next two years these tunes evolved into a major musical comprised of themes and motifs from Franklin's time and using Gildrie's distillation of Franklin's words as texts.

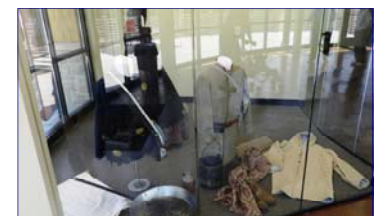
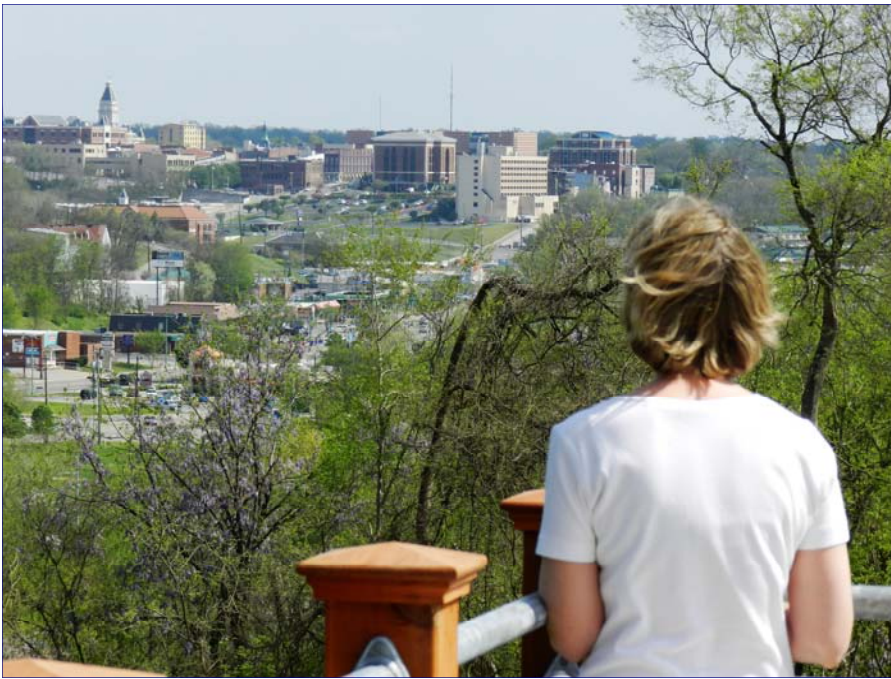
The staging of the show in APSU's MMC concert hall proved a huge success. Under Lisa Conklin-Bishop's direction, and involving most of her family, the play was replete with stunning sets, gor-

geous period costumes, and an entire orchestra conducted by Greg Wolyneec. The roles of the characters were performed in keeping with the light-hearted approach taken by both Gildrie and Mabry, with Ben played convincingly by Russell Qualls, and Poor Richard and Samuel Meredith memorably portrayed by Thomas King and the Roxy's John McDonald.

One can only imagine the full extent of Richard Gildrie's elation at seeing both of these projects that had dominated many of his years come to life in the same week. There are well-founded reports, however, that at one point following the Ben performance Richard was seen leaping into the air—no small feat for a large man—and that at Fort Defiance he was observed hugging three total strangers and a large tree, all at the same time. These reports are surely exaggerated.



Gallery: Opening day at Fort Defiance



Thinking about Japan

Japan is frequently on my mind, especially since the recent disaster. Japan has been a part of my family's life since the summer of 1988. That summer a 14-year-old boy, Toshi Ishii from Tokyo, spent July with us. He was the 4-H guest of our son Daniel. Then in 1993, Daniel and I both visited Japan, separately. Daniel did a homestay in Niigata Prefecture, and I visited Mitsuko Asahina and her family in Osaka.

My visit focused on starting APSU's first Japan Program, and for 10 years, 1994-2004, nine graduate students and seven undergraduates came from Osaka to study and teach Japanese at APSU. All of the women graduate students returned to Japan with a master's degree in education, and the APSU community was richer because of Japanese language study.

Both Daniel and my husband Floyd enjoyed learning that language. Daniel still speaks Japanese every day as a professional interpreter.

So when the earthquakes started recently, violently damaging Japan, my family's heart and mind caught as we saw the physical devastation, and we thought about and felt the pain of these extraordinary people. The beautiful farm lands, crowded cities, busy thoroughfares, and long shorelines that we have experienced on numerous trips there were so devastated we could not watch the scenes on television.

Daniel, from his job in Columbus, Ohio, reported the extreme anxiety of both the Japanese supervisors and the local workers in that Japanese plant. All day, he said, he translated back and forth, Japanese to English, English to Japanese, for Japanese who were in distress

Aleeta Christian

and Americans who were so concerned about them and their families and friends. This plant is still functioning, but parts from Japan are much slower coming east. So far, my family believe all of our friends are safe, but we grieve at their extreme misfortune.



In T. R. Reid's book *Confucius Lives Next Door* he states that Japan in the last 50 years has thrived for two reasons: the Japanese people stick together and are very hard workers, and America is their friend, providing physical, financial and emotional support. Americans should be very proud of that fact.

As my family continues to watch the continuing disaster, we think back to our Japanese friends' reaction on the occasion of 9/11: "We will stand beside you" was the clear message the Japanese President sent the morning after our morning of terror. It reminds us of America's friendship with these wonderful people. It also reminds us that America is at its best when it is helping around the globe, so we are thankful for that. We have witnessed firsthand the strength, solidarity, and resolve that the Japanese people bring to hardship. We know they will clean up, rebuild, and forge forward again.

*Photo:
Floyd and
Aleeta Christian with
son Daniel
and daughter
Lea
Scheuren in
Kyoto*

APSURA honors Gerald Beavers at Annual Meeting

In our annual APSURA general meeting on April 21, Gerald Beavers was given a heart-felt thank-you for his work in support of APSURA. As President Al Bekus reminded us, Gerald was instrumental in getting the association started, and he has served ably as vice president and website manager. Gerald is especially appreciated for his many innovative ideas for moving APSURA forward during these first years.

Gerald recently announced his retirement from his official APSURA position, though he promises to continue working with us as he can. Gerald, with wife Nancy at his side, accepted a plaque thanking him for his service.

In other business at the meeting, Aleeta Christian was elected vice president for the coming year. According to Aleeta, she will concentrate her efforts on developing new venues for APSURA outreach to the community and new group activities for members. She will doubtless continue to bring her considerable experience as a world-traveler to conceiving and planning adventures for APSURANS.

Jim Clemmer was elected to the new position of publicity director. During the past year Jim has developed a new format for our APSURA newsletter and has introduced the monthly News-

notes as a supplement to the newsletter. He will continue to edit both publications and will also assume responsibility for website maintenance. We are happy to have Jim now acting in an official capacity as a member of the board of directors.



Nancy and Gerald Beavers with plaque at the APSURA Annual Meeting, April 21, 2011



APSURA board meeting preceding annual meeting of members, April 21, 2011

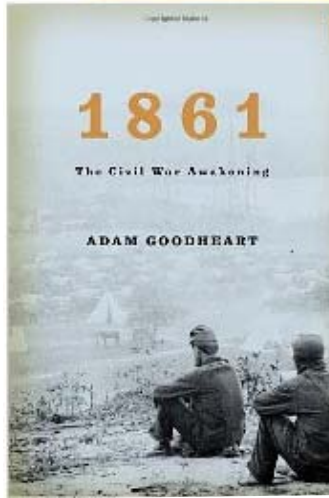
From the Bookshelf

Adam Goodheart, *1861: The Civil War Awakening*, (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011)

Review by Richard Gildrie

Brace up! We are being inundated with Civil War books for obvious reasons, including the fact that the war began 150 years ago this April. The books vary considerably in style, content, intended readership, and point of view. Mostly I intend to avoid them until the fluff and fads blow through, say about 2020.

However, I took a chance on this one because the author was interviewed on Comedy Central's Daily Show, a remarkable venue for criticism of all sorts. I was not disappointed. The author, a journalist and travel writer as well as a historian, skillfully evokes the fears, passions, and dreams of a renewed America that erupted during Walt Whitman's "hurrying, crashing, sad, distracted year."



The focus is not on the South, but on the reactions to the Secession Winter throughout the rest of the country. There are vivid portraits of the beleaguered garrison at Fort Sumter, of that amazing "female politician"

Jessie Benton Fremont's determination to keep California from declaring its independence from "the whole sorry mess," of New York firemen forming a colorful Zouave regiment, of James A. Garfield's voyage from professor to warrior, and of the first refugee slaves at Fortress Monroe.

This is no standard "drums and bugles" military history but rather social and cultural history at its best. If any of you want to borrow our copy, contact Meredith or me

at 931-648-4317.

In addition to writing and publishing poems, Gerry Tatham is currently president of the New Smyrna Beach chapter of AAUW and starring in the chapter's current Mystery Theatre production. Husband Lew is serving as historian of the AAUW chapter.

Fiction and Poetry

In My Craft: A Sullen Bark

Gerry Tatham

Nautical, though rigid rocked twixt
Scylla-wetted, shallows, sucked Charybdis jailed
Impaled.

This mental fragment: Mind

Mere hulk
A bulk of sinking, rusty ruin
Flagrant flicking wanton waves of brainy deep
Asleep
Half-seas over
Dover-beached

Washed up ashore
A-mused no more
Faint erstwhile metric metered Mate of rhyme
Lost Liner drowned in tantalizing time

Unhelmed
This ancient, hoary
Mariner of Memory's mournful story
Bastard child of literary glory
Unpreserved in salt-encrusted rime,
Victim of slain albatross of time.
Poet-tasted
Wasted on Alzheimer's addled
Shore.
Stilled-sound, sight, senses, echoing no more
Quoth the remnant, ravin' "Nevermore!"

Spare Parts

Gerry Tatham

Her frame undented, botoxed lip to chassis
 Turned-back mileage, breastworks lifted, sassy
 Denture grilled, tuned up in ear
 Adjustments to her sagging rear
 STP'ed, replacement kneed
 In smooth, unwrinkled glory
 Undimmed by years, she perseveres, goes on with her life story.

Her journey mirrored, frozen front and backing
 Reflecting what she's faced and what still lacking
 Windshield-wiped of memory, road-maps blurred to Used-to-Be
 Consigned, aligned with Senior Class forever running out of gas
 Headlight-light dimmed, retired

Still seeking mechanistic grace or plastic surgeon to replace
 Her ancient, sluggish throttle:
 Some junk-yard doc who might have lucked
 Onto a pancreatic duct
 Of nineteen-thirties model.

From the President

Al Bekus

It is hard to believe that the Austin Peay State University Retirees Association is concluding its second year of operation. I am impressed with the progress we have made. This year has been especially rewarding. In July we started the year with our Retirees Reception at the Pace Center at Emerald Hills with a very good turnout followed by the Convocation and the Faculty Picnic in August—always exciting and great fun.

The second annual Retirement Seminar presented in the fall by Human Resources was again quite helpful to those involved in the retirement process. I have already publicized on The Gov Says a new book by Edwin M. and Brian D. Bridges aptly entitled *The Prudent Professor: Planning and Saving for a Worry-Free Retirement from Academe*. All Austin Peay faculty should be familiar with this book regardless of when they plan to retire. It is a gold mine of important information.

This year we also started *Newsnotes*, available on our website and e-mailed to members, which lists various events of interest to retirees. For example, this fall a group of retirees attended the Roxy's perform-

ance of *Shout*, which was publicized in *Newsnotes*.

A group of retirees also enjoyed the fall colors with a weekend trip to Fall Creek Falls in October. Then the Christmas festivities: the Music Department's Christmas choral and instrumental presentations and the President's annual reception for retirees were all wonderful experiences. In April a lively group of APSURANS traveled to Nashville for dinner and a Nashville Symphony concert. Dinner at the Sole Mio restaurant was delightful, and the Symphony's program of Rachmaninoff and Bruckner was everything we expected. A number of us also heard Maestro Guerrero's "conversation" about the music during the hour before the performance.

This year the Association made significant progress in two very important areas. We have instituted an APSURA student scholarship for which we have already received generous donations, and, secondly, President Hall has generously agreed to fund the publication of our renovated Newsletter. We thank both our donors and the President for their support.

Officers

Al Bekus, President
 Aleeta Christian, VP
 Al Irby, Treasurer
 Hester Crews, Secretary

Directors

Ann Harris
 Meredith Gildrie
 Mitch Robinson

Publicity Director
 Jim Clemmer
 clemmerj@apsu.edu

Address

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 Austin Peay
 State University
 Box 4426
 Clarksville, TN 37044

On the Web

www.apsu.edu/retirees-association

See our website for late-breaking news on upcoming events, schedule changes, retirement benefits, and background information on the Retirees Association.



APSU Retirees Association
Box 4426
Clarksville, TN 37044

APSURA Membership Registration form

Retired faculty or staff Associate member

Check both of the above boxes if your spouse is joining as an associate member as well.

Dr. ___ Mr. ___ Ms ___ Mrs. ___ Other preferred title _____

Name of member: _____
Last First Middle

Name of spouse: _____
Last First Middle

Address: _____
Number and Street (Apartment Number)

_____ City State Zip Code

Home telephone: () _____ E-mail address: _____

Former department: _____ Years of service _____ Year you retired _____

Activities in which you would like the APSURA to be involved (Check all that apply): Group travel; Athletic events;
 Cultural events; Social events; Scholarship activities; Seminars; Community work;
 Other _____

Annual Dues for Austin Peay State University Retirees Association are:

Regular (APSU Retiree) Membership \$25.00 Please send to APSURA, P. O. Box 4426, Clarksville, TN 37044

Associate Membership \$25.00

Additional donation for Scholarship Fund _____