Jeffry Burden, commander-in-chief of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States

BY BILL LOHMANN
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Jeffry C. Burden works as an attorney and serves as commander-in-chief of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States. Burden, 52, who lives in Henrico County, also is president of the Friends of Shockoe Hill Cemetery.

What is the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, and what is your role as commander-in-chief?

The Loyal Legion was formed in Philadelphia during the last days of the Civil War, by and for officers of the Union army and navy. It was the first post-war veterans organization and had tremendous influence in the next few generations. As original members died off and male descendants joined, MOLLUS morphed into a hereditary society. We organize commemorative events and take on restoration projects and other activities. As C-in-C, I try to keep things organized and give a fair number of public talks.

Do you feel a little outnumbered in the former capital of the Confederacy? Seriously, have you ever encountered any conflict because of your affiliation?

It’s a challenge being in that position, and I enjoy it. Anyone who’s upset about having a Yankee descendant in the room is usually too polite to say anything unpleasant. This is Richmond, after all.

How did you get interested in the Civil War?

I can’t remember ever not being interested in the war. Moving to Richmond in 1985 heightened that fascination. About then, I started doing family research and found a few dozen Civil War soldiers. The closest is a great-great-grandfather who served in the 22nd Iowa Volunteer Infantry, alongside four of his close relatives. I know something about their military service but less about their civilian lives. … Amazingly, graffiti from one of my 22nd Iowa relatives turned up in a building in Winchester in 2005. He wrote about his hometown and going home to marry a “fair young lass.” I got a glimpse of a lonely, homesick young man far from home.

Where are you from, and how did you wind up in Richmond?

I was born and raised in California but left to attend college at the University of Missouri. Several family members moved to Virginia about that time and, after working in Fort Wayne,
Ind., I chose to go to law school at the University of Richmond. Besides several years spent in Alexandria, I have lived and worked in Richmond since.

Tell me about your first full-time job after college: television news reporter.

I really enjoyed reporting. The chance to meet interesting people, cover breaking news, and do unusual things was a blast. I’ve flown back-seat in both a Goodyear blimp and an F-4 fighter jet (very different experiences). TV news is an unpredictable business, especially with young families, and I figured a legal career might also be a good use of my skills. But the reporter in me is still near the surface.

How did you get involved with Shockoe Hill Cemetery, and why is that important to you?

My contact was only occasional until 2006, when I joined the Friends of Shockoe Hill Cemetery. … Shockoe Hill is a historical and cultural pearl, highlighted by the grave of Chief Justice John Marshall, and we’re doing what we can to make it thrive again. To see new markers go up at the unmarked graves of veterans, or to witness groups of people raking or repairing, is tremendously satisfying on many levels.

What else do you like to do in your spare time?

Books in the queue now for pleasure reading are “Skeletons on the Zahara,” by Richmond writer Dean King, and “Remembering the Battle of the Crater: War as Murder,” by historian and blogger Kevin Levin (formerly of Charlottesville). Joining wife, Kathleen, and kids Alex and Sarah for a kayak trip down the upper James or the Mattaponi is fun. I’m also pleased with the proliferation of craft breweries in the Richmond area.

Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States: suvcw.org/mollus/mollus.htm

Friends of Shockoe Hill Cemetery: shockoehillcemetery.org

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