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“THE DARK CLOUDS OF WAR” THE CIVIL WAR DIARY OF JOHN ZIMMERMAN OF ALEXANDRIA

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BY JACK SULLIVAN

With the election of Abraham Lincoln in November 1860, the talk of secession from the Federal Union was rampant in both the South and the North. As a result, state militias were formed, one of which was the “Alexandria Riflemen,” mustered on December 6, 1860. After the fall of Fort Sumter on April 14, 1861, the Virginia Legislature was seized with the issue of whether to join the new Confederacy. It voted for secession on May 22, 1861. Two days later Union troops attacked and occupied Alexandria.

From the outbreak of the Civil War, a 22-year-old Alexandrian and a Confederate Army private named John R. Zimmerman resolved, in his words, *to keep a diary of events as they occur during the war (should my life be spared) which may prove of interest to me in after years.** He was faithful to his vow and daily, whatever the conditions, penned an entry of what had occurred that day. Because he participated in the conflict from the very outbreak of hostilities until Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, his diary is a rich source of information to subsequent generations about the war, as seen through the eyes of a young soldier with a quite evident taste for adventure. (*Note: more about Zimmerman on page 5.)

Zimmerman began his account by lamenting its outbreak: *After vainly hoping the dark clouds of war which*

have been so long hanging over us would be turned aside, we find we are doomed to disappointment. Hostilities have begun in Virginia. A member of what previously had been called the Alexandria Riflemen and subsequently became Company A of the 17th Virginia Volunteer Regiment, he then looked back to the Fall of 1859 and his earlier deployment to Harper’s Ferry, at that time a town in Virginia:

I was with the Co. at Harpers Ferry during the John Brown raid into and after his trial and conviction, With others from the Co. was ordered to Charlestown by Gov. Hise and I was present at his execution. In the intervals of guard duty I visited him in the jail and talked with him. He said the great mistake he made was in letting the train leave Harpers Ferry thereby notifying the government of his seizing the gov armory.

Leaving Harper’s Ferry after the execution, Zimmerman and his unit returned to Alexandria and went into barracks in the Stoneybrook Building in the northeast corner of King and Columbus Streets. They drilled daily, anticipating conflict. The moment came on the morning of May 24, 1861, two days after Virginia voted to secede. Federal troops stormed across bridges and from ships and barges in the Potomac to take possession of Alexandria. Zimmerman and his comrades packed up and hurriedly left town. He described what happen next:

We continued our march through West End - pass-



Abolitionist John Brown in Prison, Fall 1859

ing my home - my mother and sisters at the door and waving us on. When about a mile outside the city saw the trains, which had been sent off to return each night for security, coming in. Maj. Case rode down to the tracks, signaled the train & turned them back to the crossing where we boarded them and moved on to Manassas, arriving about 1 PM. We found assembled there about two thousand troops including our Battalion & the 17th Regt.

Zimmerman would be assigned to the 17th Virginia for the duration of the war. Over the next few weeks, the troops bivouacked along Bull Run, initially without tents, drilled frequently and readied for a Yankee attack. General Lee visited the camp on May 28. Zimmerman, who often referred to him as "Marse Robert," described the visit: *Gen. Robt. E. Lee arrived and was greeted with hearty cheers as he is well known to many of us Alexandrians and was often seen on the streets of our city when he rode from Arlington & sits his horse with wonderful grace and dignity. It is a real pleasure to gaze upon him. Indeed I do not think I ever looked upon a nobler form.*

The expected clash came in mid-July 1861 when word was received that Federal troops had begun their long expected march from Washington toward Manassas. The 17th Virginia was deployed to Blackburn's Ford, about three miles from the town and a point where a road from Manassas to Centerville crossed. There one of the first serious skirmishes of the Civil War occurred as Federal troops sought to take the spot. Zimmerman reported:

Gen. Longstreet, who stood near me, noticed the

fire.... Gen L now ordered my Co & one other across the stream to attack the enemy and away we went, the Gen cheering us as we dashed through the water and rushed up on the hillside and were soon among the enemy.... We drove back the enemy skirmishers, killing and wounding some and capturing a few prisoners. Their main line on the plateau above us did not advance to attack us and later we rec'd orders to re-cross the stream and on reaching the West side were relieved by the 7th La Regt and another Regt of Gen Early's Brigade that had been ordered up to support our line.... After our artillery opened up, just to our right we heard nothing more from the enemy's infantry but their artillery on both sides kept up a rapid fire for about an hour. But as we were protected by the Bluff or hills opposite us we suffered no harm beyond the bringing down of tree tops and big branches on us. My Co lost one man killed (Tom Sangster) & one slightly wounded. The loss in our Brigade I hear was 68 or 70. The enemy had the advantage of numbers, position, and heavier guns but we won in the fight. The affair lasted from about 12:30 to 5 P.M. and our men are in fine spirit over our success in this our first fighting event. It was not a big battle but believe it only a prelude to one.

Zimmerman was right. The next day the battle known as First Manassas or Bull Run occurred, the first major clash of the war. Again the result was the same. The Confederates were victorious as the Federal forces fled from the field. Zimmerman would not see action in that battle because the 17th Virginia was held in reserve but participated in the pursuit of the Union forces. He called it "a glorious sight": *At every stop we had abundant evidence of their complete rout and panic: quarters of beef were hanging on the trees by the wayside, piles of boxes of crackers & coffee, pots and kettles for cooking, blankets to haversacks, rubber blankets to canteens. They seemed to have been completely panic stricken and in their flight had thrown away everything that would impede their flight.*

After chasing the beaten Yankees for two hours, Confederate troops were ordered to return to Bull Run. Zimmerman observed: *I cannot imagine why the pursuit was abandoned. All of us were in high spirits over our victory and were anxious to press on. And we had three or four or more brigades of fresh troops who, while they had been under fire all day had taken little active part and had suffered but little loss.* Military historians, with the benefit of hindsight, have asked the same question that Zimmerman did on the day of the battle. While highly respectful of his superior officers, the Alexandria youth was not shy about questioning their tactics, at least to his diary.

After Manassas, Zimmerman and the 17th went into camp near Centerville where they stayed for the winter, which was unusually harsh, resulting in extreme hardship and considerable sickness among the troops. With the coming of spring, the regiment moved south to help protect Richmond from the army of Union General George McClellan. In April, 1862, they engaged in a major battle at Williamsburg. The 17th took heavy losses with 65 officers and men either killed or wounded, about one-third of its strength. Zimmerman emerged unscathed.

His diary account of the battle was curiously devoid of details. He described the aftermath, however, saying: *Sorry we had to leave so many of our brave comrades, many of whom because of their fearful wounds we could never hope to see again on earth.*” He broke from the ranks in order to find his comrade and fellow Alexandrian, Charles McKnight, who had been wounded but would survive. At the makeshift hospital Zimmerman ran down a row of cots and saw his commanding officer, Captain Humphries, unconscious and dying. Not finding McKnight he rejoined his regiment as they marched to meet Union Forces around Richmond at the Battle of Seven Pines. Like Williamsburg, this was a fearsome battle. Zimmerman described the scene:

We were under a terrible fire from the enemy’s artillery and also their line of battle now formed along a body of woods in our front. Our loss at this time was very great and I do not think at any time during the war shall we be under a heavier fire. Belgian rifle shells, minie balls, cartridges, buck shot & ball fall like hail about us. The enemy fired low and many were shot after they had fallen. Once again the 17th took considerable casualties. Zimmerman was not hurt.

As McClellan withdrew his army toward Washington, D.C., the 17th was entrenching itself around Richmond. Thereafter ensued one of the more bizarre adventures of Zimmerman’s military career. He had become very sick, unable to report for duty, and was convinced he had malaria. From the symptoms he described, he probably was correct. The Alexandria private sought advice from his commanding officer who told him to go to Richmond and remain there until he got well. The Richmond boarding house in which he first lodged was expensive, and he decided to go to the country for his health. Borrowing civilian clothes, Zimmerman headed for Clarksville, Virginia, where his brother, Taney, lived. After spending three weeks there convalescing, he determined to return to his regiment. By this time the 17th had moved north with Lee’s Army toward fierce battles at Second Manassas and Antietam. Once again the 17th



Blackburn’s Ford on Bull Run, Virginia

would take heavy casualties.

Zimmerman set out from Clarksville to find the army. At first by train and then completely on foot he traveled over the Virginia countryside, trudging through Culpeper and Warrenton before being told by an officer he must go to Winchester. His told his diary that day: *Am sorry for this as it will give me a long march & am getting footsore as my shoes are nearly gone after the many miles on the road. Am told it is about 50 miles to Winchester.* He did not hurry. Along the route he stopped for several days to see friends in Paris, Virginia, and later lingered with an acquaintance at his home in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Barefoot by the time he reached Winchester, Zimmerman was not allowed by military authorities there to cross the Potomac into Maryland and join Lee’s Army. When the troops returned to Winchester, after seven weeks away Zimmerman was reunited with the 17th. After the battle at Antietam, the bloodiest single day in the Civil War, he found only 11 men left in his Alexandria Company A.

With his extended absence apparently not a problem for his military superiors, Zimmerman rejoined his colleagues for long bivouacs around Winchester and Culpeper. With news late in 1862 that Union General Burnside, who had replaced McClellan, was heading toward Fredericksburg with an army, the 17th and other troops were sent to reinforce the city. Zimmerman described the battle that ensued in great detail but he seemingly had been held in reserve. It was December and for weeks he had been seeking an overcoat. Obtaining permission to visit the battlefield when Union forces had retreated, Zimmerman recorded that he had “never before seen bodies strewn so thick on any field.” That did not deter him from stripping a dead Yankee of an overcoat or



The disastrous Union charge up Marye's Heights at the Battle of Fredericksburg, December 1862

from another escapade:

Moving on toward the lower end of the town I saw Maj Fairfax of Longstreet's staff, preceded by the flag of truce & followed by two or three hundred prisoners. A guard had been placed to prevent our men from passing to that end of town, but I wanted to go down to the river to see the prisoners sent over, so buttoned up the captured blue overcoat I had on to hide my uniform. I watched my opportunity and slipped in among the prisoners and at the word "Forward March," I stepped beside a Yank & marched off with them down to the river. Soon after we arrived pontoons with white flags flying started to cross to our side of the river & an officer stepped ashore bearing a roll of paper & approached Maj Fairfax. Maj F delivered him a roll bearing the names of the prisoners & they began to move toward the pontoons. So I unbuttoned my blue overcoat & stepped out from among them. The guard took in the situation at once & laughed at my trick to get to the river.

After Fredericksburg, Zimmerman's brigade went into winter bivouac at Falling Creek, Virginia. Always

bored with life in camp, that he repeatedly described as "monotonous," he was eager to attend the May 1863 funeral of Stonewall Jackson who had been fatally wounded at the Battle of Chancellorsville. Going up to Richmond, apparently with permission, he reunited with the convalescing Charles McKnight. Zimmerman described in detail Jackson's funeral procession and added this story:

Just before the procession moved an old Veteran who had lost his right arm was seen making his way through the great throng and as the order had been given to clear the building, someone told the old soldier he was too late but he continued to struggle along toward the casket when one of the marshals attempted to turn him back. At which the old man held up the stump of his arm and with tears flowing down his cheeks, exclaimed, "By this arm which I gave for my country I claim the right to see my General once more." Governor Letcher, who happened to be near, could not resist the very earnest appeal and so gave the order that the old soldier should be granted his wish and the lid of the casket was removed and the old man took a last look upon the face of his old Commander.

JOHN ROBERT ZIMMERMAN

John Robert Zimmerman was born on December 18, 1838, in Fairfax County. He was one of four children, two boys and two girls, in a family with extended kinships throughout Virginia. He was raised as an Episcopalian and attended what became Episcopal High School in Alexandria. John's father died before he attained maturity and after graduation he took a job as a clerk, living with his mother and sisters in a house on Duke Street not far from the railroad station.

He was officially inducted as a private into the Virginia Riflemen on March 17, 1861, a unit that became Company A of the 17th Virginia Volunteer Infantry. His military record indicates he participated in 13 battles, surrendering with General Lee's Army at Appomattox. He was never wounded and not promoted above private. After the war Zimmerman returned to Alexandria and took the Oath of Amnesty in August, 1865. He went to work for the J. T. Mehaffey Coal Company, located at the corner of North Union and Queen Streets, eventually taking over the business and changing its name to his own. He married and raised a family, living at 108 South St. Asaph Street. Zimmerman was active in ante-bellum community life in Alexandria, his particular interests being the Society for the Restoration of Historic Alexandria and the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. He died on February 25, 1925, at the age of 87 and is buried in St. Paul's Cemetery in Alexandria.

In the Fall 2014 *Chronicle*, Zimmerman will find himself in the midst of a pitched battle, captured, returned briefly to Alexandria, and sent to a prison camp at Point Lookout, Maryland, before being exchanged and "going South" to his regiment once again. Finally, he will describe fighting with Lee's army in the last year of the war and Lee's surrender at Appomattox.

End Note: As the result of the suggestion of George Combs, branch manager of the Local History Section of the Barrett Library, Dr. Sullivan has been transcribing and editing the handwritten diary of John Zimmerman into a computer file for the past three years. The Alexandria Library does not own the original transcript but was given a Xerox copy for its use some years ago. Dr. Sullivan has been aided in his efforts by Librarians Leslie Anderson, Mark Zoeter and Julie Downie.

The Author: Jack Sullivan, who holds a Masters Degree in Journalism and a Ph.D. in Political Science, writes about American history, concentrating on the 19th and early 20th centuries. His particular interests are the U. S. whiskey and patent medicine industries.

He was a volunteer for two years with the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum assisting with curating and cataloguing its collection. For the past four years Sullivan has been a volunteer with the Local History Division of the Alexandria Public Library. There he has been transcribing the handwritten diary of John Zimmerman, Confederate soldier.

Sullivan is a 47-year resident of Alexandria and civic activist. He has been a member of a number of city boards and commissions.

AN UNCOVERED MEANING IN THE MINNIGERODE MEMORIAL ARCH

AT THE VIRGINIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

by Sherry Hulfish Browne

There is a small and very charming cemetery on the grounds of the Virginia Theological Seminary. You can see it from Quaker Lane near the intersection with Seminary Road if you allow your eyes to wander up the grassy incline to the tree line.

The white headstones stand out against the dark evergreens behind. A lacey black iron arch graces the entrance to the cemetery and is more difficult to see from the street as the color melds into the dark background. If you walk into the cemetery under the arch and turn around the arch becomes more visible against the eastern sky.

The arch itself has been through a lot since it was dedicated on Easter Eve in April 1925 at the main entrance to the Seminary on Quaker Lane. Unique and arresting, it originally stood on high brick pillars topped with handsome lanterns surmounted by crosses. It was made of one continuous piece of metal without a single bolt or rivet. Since then it has suffered numerous injuries, been buffeted by untold storms, relocated and broken by a falling tree. It stands now rather like an aging beauty – bolted and riveted all over and somewhat shorter in stature but still lovely.

The arch was dedicated as a memorial to Reverend Dr. Charles Frederick Ernest Minnigerode (1814-1894), a German political exile who came to this country in 1839 at the age of 25. His life was remarkable. He entered the University of Giessen as a law student in 1832 where he fell under the influence of peers with revolutionary political ideals related to liberty and human rights. This association led to his arrest and imprisonment in 1834 by the corrupt and oppressive government. He was offered his freedom if he informed on his compatriots but he refused and was placed in solitary confinement and tortured for three years until it was feared he would die in prison. He was transferred to his father's home under house arrest and guarded day and night for two years. As his state of health appeared hopeless the government dropped the charges against him but warned

him that should any future suspicion arise he would be prosecuted. Minnigerode left Germany for America in 1839.

Well educated and considered brilliant by many contemporaries Minnigerode initially made a living by teaching languages in Philadelphia until 1842 when he accepted the position of Professor of Humanities at the College of William and Mary. It was in Williamsburg that he gained the distinction of introducing the first documented Christmas tree in Virginia. It was also in Williamsburg where he met and married Mary Gibbon Carter and where he made the decision to enter the Episcopal ministry. He married Mary at Bruton Parish Church in 1843 and was ordained there in 1847.

Minnigerode's first full-time church assignment after leaving academia was to two small rural churches in Prince George County, Virginia – Merchants Hope and Martin's Brandon. Both churches are active parishes even today. In 1853 he was called to the largest communion in the Virginia diocese at that time – Christ Church in Norfolk (now called Christ and St. Luke's Church). In 1856 he was called to the relatively new St. Paul's Church (consecrated 1845) in Richmond, Virginia. It was here that he settled and stayed 34 years, becoming Rector Emeritus. His years covered the Civil War when he became a close friend and spiritual advisor to Jefferson Davis whom he baptized and who was confirmed in his church. Robert E. Lee and his family were parishioners during the War along with so many Confederate Generals and officers that the church was called the "Cathedral of the Confederacy."

Minnigerode retired in 1889 due to failing health and moved to Alexandria where he and Mary and their unmarried daughter Belle took up residence at 918 King Street. The Minnigerodes had raised nine surviving of eleven children and they had a pack of grandchildren, some living in the Alexandria area. Minnigerode maintained his connection with the Virginia Theological Seminary where he had been a Trustee and on the Board of



Dedication of the Minnigerode Gate, Easter Eve, April 11, 1925. In 1925, the gate spanned the formal entrance from Quaker Lane to Seminary property. That entrance was just north of Aspinwall Hall Lane (which intersects North Quaker Lane). Today the original brick pillars remain, but the driveway is closed. In the 1950s, the arch was moved to the entrance of the Seminary cemetery, a less conspicuous location. Access to the Minnigerode Gate and cemetery is now from Aspinwall Hall Lane. To visit the cemetery, drive up the Lane and park opposite the homes on your left. Walk across the grass between the two homes and continue to the Minnigerode Gate on your right.

In the photo, front row, are the author's great-grandmother, Mrs. F. J. Davidson, wearing black widow's weeds; the author's grandmother, Mrs. Florence Davidson Maigne, a pioneer in Alexandria historic restoration; her mother, Polly Minnigerode Maigne (later Hulfish), a young flapper in a flame stitch dress and later, in the 1960s, a major figure in Alexandria historic restoration; and her aunt Frances Davidson Maigne, a student at St. Agnes. The man in clerical garb is the Rev. Dr. Berryman Green, Dean, who officiated. The woman at the far right is thought to be Marietta Minnigerode Andrews. Behind her is her son Eliphalet Andrews, Jr., and L.L. Duckett. Photo property of the Virginia Theological Seminary.

Examiners for many years, and he became an unofficial chaplain there in his retirement.

On May 13, 1893, Rev. and Mrs. Minnigerode celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary with a big party at their home attended by many from the Seminary, from Richmond and Washington, and from Alexandria. As described in the *Alexandria Gazette*: "Rev. George H. Norton, rector of St. Paul's Church, this city, then presented the congratulations of the people of Alexandria, among whom Dr. Minnigerode has made his home, and by whom he is so much beloved."

Alexandria citizens attending the party were numerous and included Brigadier General Montgomery D. Corse, a highly respected veteran of both the Mexican War and the War Between the States, a native Alexan-

drian and banker; Col. Arthur Herbert, co-founder of Burke & Herbert Bank and Trust Co.; Major and Mrs. William Herbert, he a wholesale grain dealer and postmaster in Alexandria; Mrs. George Uhler (nee Nellie Seldon Lloyd) whose husband was Secretary and Treasurer of the Alexandria Water Co. and a Charter Member of the Columbia Fire Engine Co.; Mrs. John M. Johnson whose husband was a local attorney; Rev. Dr. Henderson Suter, Rector of Christ Church, and Mrs. Suter. Also attending were Col. and Mrs. Legh Wilber Reid, he for many years the Secretary of the Orange, Alexandria, and Manassas Railroad and later the assistant register of the Treasury under President Grover Cleveland; Major George Johnston, insurance agent and vestryman at St. Paul's Church, and Mrs. Johnson; Miss Rebecca C. Powell and Miss



Mary and Charles Minnigerode, undated photograph, but possibly taken at their 50th Wedding Anniversary party. Virginia Historical Society.

Dora Chinn, Principals of the Arlington Institute, a private girls academy in Alexandria; and Col. and Mrs. Julius de Lagnel. Col. de Lagnel was a veteran of both the U.S. Army and the Confederate Army; he was an artillery specialist who declined a promotion to Brigadier General in the CSA. Additionally, members of the Jackson, Beach, Dawson, Hoxton, Ramsey, Fendall, Tackett, Stabler, and Lloyd families were present.

This is only a partial list of the Alexandria guests but it shows that many local citizens came together to honor Rev. Minnigerode and his wife on their special anniversary and that he had the esteem of the community.

The photograph of Charles and Mary Minnigerode is undated. Most archivists and historians suspect the photo was taken at the Anniversary party. It is known from family letters that a photographer was procured to take pictures of the two honorees that day. It is a wonderfully candid photograph, so rare in that era of formally posed photographs. Both Charles and Mary look happy and relaxed. The object in Rev. Minnigerode's hand resembles a child's party hat.

Rev. Minnigerode died the following year at the age of 80. A large impressive funeral with an overflow crowd of mourners took place at St. Paul's Church in Richmond with burial in the family plot at Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery, a plot not far from the resting place of the Jefferson Davis family. At the time of his death

Dr. Minnigerode was considered the most influential Episcopal minister in the South and was a household name in Richmond and beyond.

The large, granite cross, on page 9, was erected by Rev. Minnigerode's family at his grave. It appears masculine and Teutonic, almost modern in its rugged minimalism. It is a striking contrast to the feminine and frothy arch at the Seminary in Alexandria.

The Minnigerode Memorial Arch was designed and partially crafted by Reverend Minnigerode's great-grandson Eliphalet Fraser Andrews Jr. who had a particular affinity for metal work and who came by his artistic talent naturally. His father was the first Director of the Corcoran School of Art and a prominent portrait artist. Today Eliphalet Sr.'s posthumous portraits of Martha Washington and Thomas Jefferson hang in the White House and that of John Quincy Adams hangs in the Senate. Eliphalet Jr.'s mother was Marietta Minnigerode, granddaughter of Rev. Minnigerode, and an artist in her own right known for her watercolors and silhouettes. She was a teacher and a founder of the Washington Water Color Society. Later she became an author and a major fundraiser for the purchase and restoration of Monticello.

Marietta was a young art student at the Corcoran when she met Mr. Andrews who was 34 years her senior. A handsome and wealthy widower, he was considered one of the most eligible men in Washington. Age was no impediment to romance and they married in 1895.

For many years Marietta ran a salon in their Washington, D.C. home/studio at 1232 16th Street, N. W. attended by prominent artists, writers, scientists and politicians of that time. The couple had two children – Eliphalet Jr. and a daughter Mary Lord. In 1902 they bought a tract of land known as Vacluse along Seminary Road across the street from part of the Seminary. Here they built a compound including the house, stables, an amphitheater, chapel, guest cottage and art studio. This was their summer home when not in Europe and where they lived permanently after Mr. Andrews retired from the Corcoran. For Eliphalet Jr. the Seminary grounds became an extension of his own backyard. It was a familiar place and the connection between his family and the Seminary was maintained because of proximity and the ties with Rev. Minnigerode.

The *Alexandria Gazette* ran a most complimentary account of the dedication and included a description of the gate: "The gate consists of two brick posts, surmounted by lanterns and joined by a wrought-iron arch. The design is symbolical, representing "Through Nature to God," the seven sprays of roses in the arch typifying the mystic number of perfection. The lights represent The Light of the World, the clover leaves in the design



A very large and rugged granite cross was erected by the Minnigerode Family at Charles Minnigerode's grave site, in the Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond.

the Trinity – three in one. The three crosses, one terminating the arch, the others terminating the lanterns, represent repentance, atonement, and absolution. The ironwork was executed by Mr. Andrews and Mr. Buckheit at the shops of the Southern Oxygen Co. It is a piece of solid welding, without a bolt or rivet, and is a fine medium. Mr. Andrews also did the Tucker memorial lamp in St. Margaret's Church, Washington."

In her book *Memoirs of a Poor Relation*, Marietta described the symbolism of her son's arch similarly:

"The symbolism reads "Through Nature to God," the peacock feathers and roses expressions of physical nature, the Cross surmounting them, speaking for the Divine. The seven sprays of roses, the mystic number of perfection. The three crosses, one on each lantern as well as one that finishes the arch, the Three Crosses of Calvary and symbolic of Repentance, Atonement, and Absolution."

These symbols are certainly fitting with the arch's location at a Theological Seminary and with Dr. Minnigerode's life work. So what is meant by the "hidden meaning" as referred to in the title of this article?

We can thank modern genealogy and the meticulous family history records kept in Germany that uncovered an unexpected interpretation of the symbols in the arch. It all begins with Rev. Minnigerode's great-grandfather, Heinrich von Minnigerode (1692 - 1749) who was a high-ranking member of the ancient and noble von Minnigerode family, a family that German researchers date back to 1203 and is fully documented in 1353-1414 with

the Knight Hans von Minnigerode.

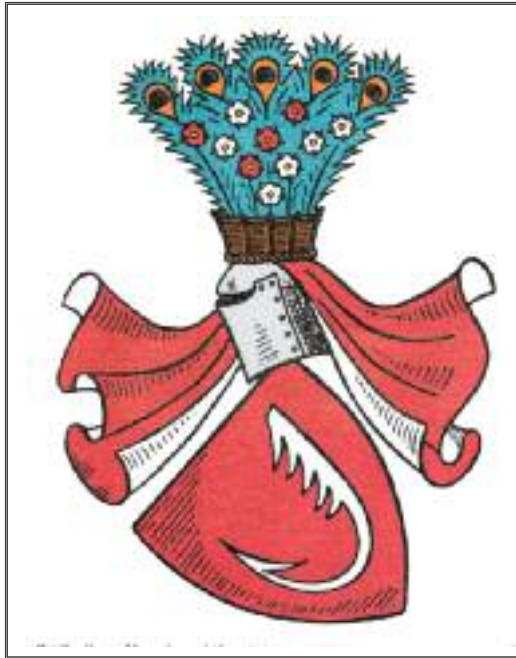
Heinrich was very successful professionally. He became close friends with the ruling Prince and rose to become the Primary Master of the Hunt for the entire state of Hesse-Darmstadt. Later he became Privy Counselor with the title of "Excellency" and a high salary. But Heinrich was unlucky in love. Not able to find a wife near his home, the Prince gave him a year off in 1724 to travel, perhaps to study the land as Heinrich was initially a forester but also likely for the purpose of finding a wife. Heinrich was unsuccessful and was essentially left at the altar; he returned home defeated. He gave up and never married. Fifteen years later he impregnated his housekeeper Christina Lucia Romeiser who gave birth in 1739 to an illegitimate son she called Benjamin Roth. Illegitimate children were called "natural children" and were not given the biological father's name but were given either the mother's name or some other name.

In 1749 Heinrich was ill; he died later that year. Benjamin was then 10 years old and his father, for whatever reason, went to some trouble to have him "legitimized." This likely involved petitioning the Prince and the Court and paying some money. Heinrich was successful and Benjamin was given the last name Minnigerode. The rules were that Benjamin and his descendants could not claim the "von" which denoted nobility, nor could they ever inherit the lands or property of the von Minnigerode nobles, nor could they adopt the von Minnigerode coat of arms or ancient lineage. In addition to the legitimization Heinrich arranged for Benjamin to attend boarding school and also left him a considerable fortune in his will. Nevertheless Benjamin and his descendants remained disenfranchised from their noble bloodline in perpetuity.

The von Minnigerodes did not recognize the Minnigerode line; it was not until the 1982 publication of *History of the Barons of Minnigerode* (English translation of the German title) that Benjamin and his heirs were listed along with the full circumstances. The book was generous to Benjamin Minnigerode and stated "he is the founder of the middle-class line of Minnigerodes which contains many industrious and respected members."

The ancient von Minnigerode family crest is shown following. At the top is a spray of feathers identified as peacock feathers. Superimposed on the feathers are roses. If you look closely at the Minnigerode Memorial Arch it is composed of a spray of roses in the center and long peacock feathers on the sides.

The memorial arch in essence appears to be a tribute to Rev. Minnigerode's noble heritage with ecclesiastical symbols superimposed. The family was a pious one and there is no diminishment of the religious sensi-



Early Minnigerode Family crest with dramatic peacock feathers and roses.

bility here, rather it is a combination of the religious and the personal, the latter not being overtly explained. It is unknown to what extent Rev. Minnigerode's American children knew what had taken place in Germany regarding the Minnigerode/von Minnigerode division. However his children were well aware of the stories of their noble line and they enthusiastically embraced them.

At some point the information about the illegitimacy of Benjamin Minnigerode disappeared from the awareness of the American descendants. An argument can be made that it was Rev. Minnigerode himself who chose to omit that part of the family story. There was no liability to him in America for claiming his rightful heritage and, given how unacceptable illegitimacy was, he may have decided to erase that aspect for posterity. This is conjecture, of course, and the silence may have arisen at another point along the line. When I started working on the family history I assumed that the Minnigerodes and the von Minnigerodes were the same. I had been told that Germans coming to America often dropped the "von" in front of their surnames as it seemed too pretentious in American society. I just figured the good Reverend had done the same. After all, Americans are not usually savvy about European class structure and often not very interested.

In their letters and books the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Rev. Minnigerode presented the family history in a natural and matter-of-fact style. Marietta and Eliphalet Andrews took Eliphalet Jr. and Mary Lord to Germany to show them the castles of their forebears. Marietta tried to formulate the genealogy but

could never quite make it add up as she kept trying to connect Benjamin to a nobleman who was a distant cousin rather than to his biological father who in German lineage had no documented children. I believe Eliphalet Jr. proudly and innocently incorporated the ancient elements of the von Minnigerode family crest into the arch as a tribute to his great-grandfather's noble heritage because it was what he had always been told. Along my immediate line down from Rev. Minnigerode there was no knowledge of the illegitimacy in the two generations prior to mine; this would correspond to Rev. Minnigerode's grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

For us, the observers, we gain a deeper understanding of what is encompassed by that lacey wrought-iron confection that is the Minnigerode Memorial Arch standing over the cemetery entrance at the Virginia Theological Seminary. The simple roses and feathers take on new meaning when we appreciate the multiplicity of references, references to the spiritual and to nature, to a stunningly ancient noble heritage, and to the messy human condition with its complicated emotions regarding family, bloodline, and inclusion. Go look at the Arch. It is very lovely.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sherry Hulfish Browne is a 6th generation Alexandrian and the great-great granddaughter of Rev. Charles Minnigerode. A retired clinical psychologist, she graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Maryland with a B.A. in Psychology; she received a M.A. and Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Florida following an internship at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital in Washington, D.C. After 30 years of practice locally in both private and managed care settings, Sherry retired in 2009 and embarked on a personal mission to research, compile and put in narrative form her family history in order to leave a written record behind. Her first project was a compilation of her mother’s c. 1960s house renovations in Alexandria. Entitled *Polly’s Houses*, the manuscript is slated for upcoming publication by the Historic Alexandria Foundation. She wrote three subsequent unpublished volumes in 2010-2012 about her colorful German line, the Minnigerodes. Beginning in 2014 she is turning her attention to her Alexandria line whose founding patriarch was Scottish sea Captain James Davidson who arrived in Alexandria in 1796 and opened The Ship’s Tavern on Prince Street’s Gentry Row in 1800. In 1799 Captain Davidson was one of the Freemasons who participated in the Masonic burial service for George Washington at Mount Vernon.

Sherry lives with her husband Hendrik near the Wilton Woods area of Alexandria; their daughter Polly lives in London and provides an excuse for periodic visits to England. Sherry belongs to several heritage, historical and genealogical societies; she also loves her garden and fixing up two large inherited antique dollhouses.

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In this issue are two articles. The first, *"The Dark Clouds of War" The Civil War Diary of John Zimmerman of Alexandria*, by John Sullivan, recounts the life of a Confederate soldier from 1861 to 1863. Zimmerman describes both the battles and the every day events of men at war.

The second article invites us to visit the Minnigerode Memorial Arch at the entrance to the cemetery at the Virginia Theological Seminary. By Sherry Hulfish Browne, the article explains how the arch came to be where it is and how geneological research can reveal the past in unexpected ways.

Later, in April look for an article by Luke Pecoraro, Research Director for Archaeological Research, at George Washington's Mount Vernon, on how Mt. Vernon's economic activities affected nearby plantations and towns.

The mission of the Alexandria Historical Society is to promote an active interest in American history and particularly in the history of Alexandria and Virginia. For information about society lectures and awards presentations and for past issues of the *Newsletter* and *Alexandria Chronicle* please visit the society's web site: www.alexandriahistorical.org. The *Chronicle* is published through the support of the J. Patten Abshire Memorial Fund.

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