

Alexandria Times

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Lewis Cass White and the history of Fort Stevens

Lewis Cass White served in the 102nd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry and experienced combat in the Battle of Fort Stevens on July 11 and 12, 1864. President Abraham Lincoln came under fire during the battle, as he watched from the fort's ramparts, leading historians to dub the fight "The Battle to Save Washington."

Lincoln's presence at the battle was common for citizens during the Civil War. Civilians often watched skirmishes and battles as a form of entertainment. Both President and First Lady Lincoln went to observe the battle of Fort Stevens. Legend has it that Lincoln's height and stovepipe hat attracted the attention of Confederate marksmen.

Eyewitness accounts of the day conflict, one account claims that future Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes shouted to Lincoln, "Get down you damn fool!" Another eyewitness, surgeon Cornelius Crawford, provided Lewis Cass White with his account of the incident. Crawford included a diagram of where people stood in the fort during the incident. That dia-

gram is now preserved at the Fort Ward Museum and Historic Site.

After the Confederate surrender ended the Civil War in 1865, White worked feverishly to collect eyewitness accounts of the Battle of Fort Stevens and coordinated with other veterans of the battle to preserve the remnants of the fort. White played an instrumental role in the installation of a monument marking the spot where Lincoln stood during the battle, and brought publicity to the nearby Battleground National Cemetery, where his fallen Union comrades lay at rest.

White joined multiple veteran groups, including the Grand Army of the Republic. His support and speeches at meetings of these veteran groups helped him build a network of willing witnesses to the Battle of Fort Stevens. His frequent appearances also allowed him to raise funds for the memorialization of the battle site.

The Lewis Cass White Collection includes almost 200 documents, objects, photographs and ephemera related to White's Civil War experi-



PHOTO/FORT WARD MUSEUM COLLECTION

Badge from the 36th Encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic from Oct. 6 to 10, 1902.

ence and his post-war mission to preserve the Defenses of Washington, especially Fort Stevens. In 2014, Joseph and Sharon Scopin generously donated the collection to Fort Ward Museum and Historic Site, the best-preserved fort of the Defenses of Washington.

Historic Alexandria invites the public to a specialty tour and view the Lewis Cass White Collection exhibit at Fort Ward Museum and Historic Site on Saturday. The exhibit explores

the efforts of Civil War veteran Lewis Cass White to preserve and memorialize the site of Fort Stevens, the only fort of the Defenses of Washington that saw battle.

The Specialty Tour: Fort Ward and Lewis Cass White is on Sept. 6 from 10 to 11 a.m. Tickets must be purchased online at shop.alexandriava.gov.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.