



Was it surrender or a compromise?

Civil War experts debated York's actions.

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For the Daily Record/Sunday News

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The fact that people are still fascinated by York's decision to cut a deal with the Confederates in exchange for saving the town -- more than the historic decision itself -- is what drew Melissa Wyatt and her husband, Andy, to a discussion Wednesday.

The York Township couple and about 75 others attended a discussion at the York County Heritage Trust where Civil War experts described events surrounding the Confederate occupation of York and discussed "Should York have surrendered to the Confederates?"

The event, the kickoff for the city's fifth annual Patriot Days, featured historians and authors Jim McClure, Mark Snell, Scott Mingus, June Lloyd and Scott Butcher.

"Technically, York did not surrender," Mingus said. The town made a deal with the Confederates that locals at the time thought was a compromise necessary to protect private property, he said.

The Confederates demanded a "ransom" for the town that included a large sum of currency, shoes and food, he said.

Newspapers, including the Philadelphia Press, "butchered" York's leaders for making a "disgraceful" deal, Mingus said.

"The safety of the town would have been in danger," he said.

Snell, a York native and the director of the George Tyler Moore Center for the study of the Civil War at Shepherd College in West Virginia, talked of the politically charged atmosphere in 1863 York.

"I don't think that York has anything to be ashamed of," Snell said.

Knowing that other nearby areas, such as Carlisle, had been devastated, local business owners

and residents were afraid of the Confederates, said Lloyd, who has studied letters and first-person accounts.

Butcher, author of "Civil War Walking Tour of York, Pennsylvania," said important buildings in York such as the Horace Bonham House might have been destroyed had there been a battle.

"Fortunately, there was no fighting here. . . . We have some wonderful buildings," Butcher said. "They made the right decision. They were saving their town."

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McClure, editor of the Daily Record/Sunday News, said York wasn't up to the fight, so its leaders made a deal.

And although it's important to understand and discuss the history that surrounded York's decision to surrender to the Confederates and spare the town, people should also consider the sacrifices thousands of York County soldiers and residents made to help free the slaves, McClure said.

"I appreciate . . . McClure's perspective," Melissa Wyatt said after the discussion. "Why are people still so fascinated by this?"

PATRIOT DAYS

The celebration continues into the weekend with a variety of events.

-- Victorian Evening, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. today, Historical Society Museum and Library. Reservations required; \$7.

-- Tavern Life in Old York Town, 5:30 to 10 p.m. Friday; tours at the Colonial Complex, \$5; micro-brew festival at the Agricultural and Industrial Museum, \$30 in advance or \$35 at the door.

-- Living in York's Past, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday; Colonial Complex, Bonham House, Historical Society Museum.

Call York County Heritage Trust at 848-1587 or visit www.yorkheritage.org .

ON THE BLOGS

Snippets from history blogs at www.yorkblog.com :

"Despite the pagentry associated in drawings of Camp Scott -- the old York Fairgrounds converted to military camp -- its presence gave many York County residents early first-hand knowledge of the horrors of war.

... They settled at the fairgrounds, then southeast of the King and Queen street intersection, the first of tens of thousands to camp and train there. Soldiers slept on straw in sheds designed for livestock... ."

-- *Jim McClure,*
www.yorktownsquare.com

"Why did Civil War veteran George M. Prince write to Hanover, Pennsylvania Postmaster Hostetter asking for names of widows?

It seems that George M. Prince had been a member of the Fifth New York Cavalry, under General Kilpatrick, when they skirmished with Confederate troops at Hanover in 1863. ... After his wife died, he remembered how kind the people of Hanover had been to the Union soldiers and wrote that "... he would be pleased to correspond with a Hanover widow of forty-five or fifty years of age, with a view to matrimony."

-- *June Lloyd,*
www.yorkblog.com/universal

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"Add Jefferson area merchant Conrad Myers to the long list of York County merchants who felt the sting of the Confederate raiding parties during the Gettysburg Campaign. Stuart's cavaliers paused to rob more than a dozen shopkeepers from Jefferson to Dillsburg over a 24-hour period. Throw in those merchants in York, Wrightsville, and other locales visited by the cavalry and infantry of Jubal Early, and it was a bad week for several families who relied on the weekly income from these stores."

-- *Scott Mingus,*

www.yorkblog.com/cannonball

"I recently had the opportunity to attend a presentation about local Revolutionary War tourism. Among the many interesting comments and ideas of the presenter, one was that the local community needs to do a better job expanding 'revolution' to mean more than just the Revolutionary War.

York is proud of its colonial past and Revolutionary heritage. A friend of mine once described York as a 'Victorian town with a colonial attitude.'"

-- *Scott Butcher,*

www.yorkblog.com/window

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