

- > EXPLORING WASHINGTON, D.C.'S PAST AND EXPERIENCING ITS PRESENT
- > DID PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S ASSASSIN LIVE OUT HIS DAYS IN TEXAS?



JUNE 15, 2011

AMERICAN WAY

AMERICAN AIRLINES + AMERICAN EAGLE

Richmond, Virginia, 150 Years Later

A century and a half after the first shot was fired in the **CIVIL WAR**, the Fist City springs eternal

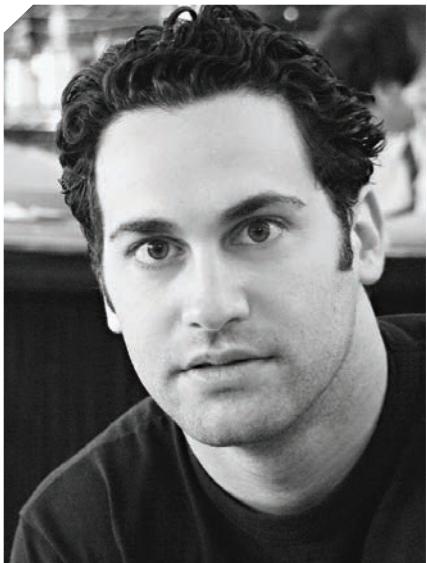


THE OLD MAN AND THE VALLEY
Revisiting the last years of
Ernest Hemingway's life in Idaho

FINDING PHARAOHS
Meet the man who is perhaps
the best and most controversial
archaeologist in Egypt

TWICE MONTHLY

Q&A
The Marathon Man
of Wimbleton
p. 22



Return to Splendor

MARY CHESNUT WAS OVERWHELMED WITH grief and utterly heartbroken. She spent the early days of May shoring up her personal affairs and tying up loose ends. Mary wasn't a native of Richmond, Va.: Her entire life was one of vagabondage, moving around at an early age as she did between South Carolina and Mississippi, only to eventually settle with her husband in the historic city at the falls of the James River. Even in her younger years, Mary recorded how she dreamed of relocating to resplendent Richmond. Writing in her diary from her home in Camden, S.C., "I am always ill. The name of my disease is a longing to get away from here and to go to Richmond."

Long before the Chesnuts moved to their nation's capital, the city held a rather mythological position in her mind's eye. Richmond was the aristocratic hub of Colonial America, and after the Virginia House of Burgesses passed the Warehouse Act in 1730 — from whence the tobacco industry boomed — English nobility as well as the stateside upper class used the revenue to build a shimmering city, flanked by shimmering neighborhoods like Church Hill. And all those years later, Mary, like the rest of her friends and acquaintances, reveled in belonging to historic Southern high society. Status meant everything.

When she did finally arrive, her contemporaries immediately accepted her. "Always pleasant people," she opined. "Indeed, I have had a good time everywhere — always clever people and people I liked. And everybody is so good to me."

Yes, there were galas and balls — grand balls, perhaps the grandest in all the land — that she would attend when her husband's busy political schedule permitted. Yet Mary derived the greatest delight from what would seem to be the most ho-hum activities. "The Virginia breakfast," she wrote, "is a thing *comme il y en peu* in the world."

But then, almost as abruptly as it began, her time in Richmond transformed from fairy tale to nightmare. The winds of change were blowing — politically, economically and socially — and the city at the falls of the James River now became the most coveted of prizes for people Mary simply referred to as "the Yankees." Richmond was in a state of controlled chaos and virtual lockdown. When most of the men in town enlisted in the army, those that did remain were penniless and without the means to support themselves and their families. Food production decreased, tobacco harvests were not properly tended to, and theft became the means *du jour* of putting supper on the table. Mary's president declared martial law in the city and also suspended civil jurisdiction and the writ of habeas corpus as a way to tamp the turmoil, but these actions did not console Mary. If anything, they made her feel as if her city ... they

made her feel as if her country was becoming too much like that of the Yankees. After four years of civil war, what was unthinkable just five years earlier had now become a reality for Mary.

"Richmond has fallen," she recorded in her diary, "and I have no heart to write about it. ... They are too many for us. Everything is lost in Richmond, even our archives. Blue-black is our horizon. ... General Hood said, 'You will all be obliged to go west, Texas, I mean. Your own country will be overrun.'

—Mary Chesnut; April 7, 1865; Richmond, Va.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the first shots fired in the Civil War. To commemorate such a momentous event in American history, *American Way's* cover story (page 34) is about modern-day Richmond, once again flourishing and once again the darling of the Southeast. This issue also encourages you to visit our nation's capital, both for Civil War observances and for an all-around enjoyable summertime experience (page 24). For the conspiracy theorists among you, columnist Carlton Stowers offers a unique yarn about the fate of John Wilkes Booth after he assassinated President Abraham Lincoln (page 90).

Mary Chesnut's diary was published in 1905, and it remains one of the most important documentations of life in war-torn Dixie. Although the Richmond she knew seemed destroyed beyond recognition in 1865, the Richmond of today — complete with flourishing businesses and Segway tours — has indeed returned to splendor.

ADAM PITLUK
Editor

Want to sign up for e-mail
notification of Adam's column or to
read his past columns? Visit
www.americanwaymag.com/whatsnew

We're blogging!
American Way is published twice a month, but our new blog, *OnTheFly*, is updated regularly with exclusive content not found in the magazine. Visit the blog for our product giveaways, great videos, travel news, recommendations and much more. (You can even talk back to us.) Visit us at www.americanwaymag.com/blogs