

## In Memory of Dan Charles, Leader of the RT's Very Own "Civil War Strings"

By Carol Codori

At our meeting on March 14, 2019, I had the happy honor and sad duty to tell the audience that our friend, Dan Charles, had died on the prior Tuesday, March 12, of health issues. He was 68. I said "happy" because I was honored to share his legacy with our members. I said "sad" because we lost a kind and generous friend who humbly added so much to the quality of our RT's programs. Many of you didn't know Dan, who sat quietly in the back of the room on most months, until the very last few meetings, when he did not feel well.

We met here *circa* 2012, at one of my very first RT meetings. We became fast friends who both loved history and classic movies. We had a "telebook club" where on occasion, we'd chat on the phone or over lunch for a good hour, about who was reading what and how it related to the Civil War. He was an avid collector of books, coins, stamps, and most of all, music. He was a citizen-historian in the truest sense of the term, with a deep knowledge of literature, antiques and art as well.

Dan did not want any credit; he turned from the spotlight when I wanted to recognize him. He *did* want to share the music of the civil war period. He researched music of the era that soldiers and citizens grew up with and depended on—waltzes, hymns, marches, dirges. He created playlists, arranged many practices, invited other musicians to get involved and join the RT (especially Marcia Chesebro and Bill Cassells). He even shopped with me for period garb—including my green velvet hoop dress and his pin stripe cut-away jacket!

Dan was the not-so-secret weapon to add a creative touch to my 2013-2015 term as RT president--and beyond. I would like to thank and recognize all the other players with the Huntsville Traditional Music Association who worked with Dan to enhance our Sesquicentennial events. They came in period dress to The Ledges, Cooper House, Weeden House, plus more recently to the RT's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration and to the Athens Cemetery Stroll.

We knew many of the songs they played, but we may not have recognized others until we heard them: Oh Susanna, Home Sweet Home, Marching through Georgia, Battle Hymn of the Republic, Dixie, Camptown Races, Ashoken Farewell, Bonnie Blue Flag, Sewanne River, Banks of the Ohio, Battle Cry of Freedom, Girl I Left Behind, Kingdom Coming, Swing Low Sweet Chariot, Soldier's Joy, Knot of Blue and Gray, Hard Times, When Johnny Comes Marching Home, St. Anne's Reel, and Nelly Bly.

To quote another friend from his current local band Milltowne, "Dan was a fixture in the Huntsville traditional music community. One of the most generous and talented musicians I have known--always encouraging; always willing to play music, any song, anywhere, anytime, in any key, with anyone and everyone. Dan's musical vocabulary was far reaching, with an uncanny ability to listen to and to hear what other musicians were playing. Dan's ego-less playing lifted those around him to new levels as he was able to make everyone he played with sound better. Well-read on most subjects, Dan was an engaging conversationalist with a sharp sense of humor. I followed Dan down many wonderful rabbit holes and always walked away from the conversation learning something I did not know and seeing things from a new perspective. It has been an honor to count Dan as a friend and an honor to count Dan as a bandmate for the past 13 years. Dan brought a lot of joy to a lot of people and he will be dearly missed. I hope some of Dan has rubbed off on me and I can somehow share that with you."

That says it better than I did. Dan would love knowing that each of us in the RT heard his personal “music” and his unspoken message to “play it forward” in our own lives. To channel Dan, I invite all his civil war players and musician friends to keep practicing and playing that beautiful period music. I’ll be calling upon you! Hail and farewell.