

# Coffee wagon brew interest at re-enactment

By Mary Grace Keller Times Staff Writer Jul 9, 2018



*BREW — Chaplain Alan Farley and wife Faith of Re-enactors' Missions for Jesus Christ brought a replica of an 1863 coffee wagon, which served Union and Confederate soldiers during the Civil War, to the Gettysburg battle re-enactment.*

Mary Grace Keller/Gettysburg Times

Civil War soldiers perked up whenever they saw the coffee wagon coming.

The Re-enactor's Missions for Jesus Christ (RMJC) hauled a replica of a Civil War era coffee wagon to the re-enactment, which marked the 155th anniversary of the battle at Gettysburg. The replica coffee wagon was made in 1970.

The patent for such a wagon was originally issued in 1863. Hot beverages were served to Union and Confederate soldiers alike throughout the war.

“They did not see blue or gray. They saw human beings in need,” said Chaplain Alan Farley, of RMJC.

The United States Christian Commission (USCC), which derived from the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) during the Civil War, towed Philadelphian Jacob Dunton’s invention to Gettysburg, Petersburg, City Point, and Appomattox Court House, according to Farley.

USCC delegates brewed coffee, hot chocolate, and tea for any soldier who wanted it, Farley said.

“They loved it, the adrenaline, the buzz they got off caffeine,” Farley said. “It boosted their morale.”

In its prime, the three boilers brewed 108 gallons of coffee in an hour, but now the wagon is in disrepair from being stored outdoors, according to Farley.

The Gettysburg Anniversary Committee on Sunday presented Farley and his wife Faith with a check to be used for the wagon’s restoration. Farley said the “substantial donation” was a total surprise, and one that will help them bring the replica back to life. Farley estimates the restoration will cost about \$10,000.

The Farleys only recently acquired the wagon from the Armed Services YMCA in Hampton, Va. RMJC signed a five-year exclusive agreement with the YMCA to show the wagon at re-enactments, which includes a restoration obligation, Farley said.

One of the wheel spokes looks like it's about to break, the boilers are rusted, and the paint is chipping. After the Gettysburg re-enactment, the Farleys head to New Holland, Pa. for an appointment with some Amish folks to get the wheel fixed.

When the coffee wagon isn't being repaired or shown, it will be stored at the Farleys' home in Appomattox County.

If the restoration goes as planned, the smell of coffee may soon rival that of black powder at re-enactments.

"We want to be making coffee here next year," Farley said.

The machine last made coffee during the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Appomattox Court House in 2015, according to Farley.

Although the coffee wagon was in the spotlight this week, the USCC's mission went far beyond hot drinks.

Harold Harker, who served at the USCC tent this week with the Farleys, said the mission of the group was to meet the spiritual and physical needs of soldiers. USCC delegates tended to the wounded, gave them hearty meals, and provided spiritual materials. USCC delegates moved with the soldiers, following them wherever help was needed, Harker said.

The USCC was also one of the few organizations that actively recruited women, who were wanted for their cooking skills, Harker said. Wounded soldiers were fed the same food as fighting men, but a woman named Annie Wittenmyer knew sick men couldn't return to health on a poor diet, so the USCC sought out wives and mothers, who made special meals with treats such as eggs and butter.

"Thousands of men went home at the end of the war because of these ladies," Harker said.

To learn more about RMJC ministry or to make a donation to the coffee wagon's restoration, visit [www.rmjc.org/Coffee\\_Wagon](http://www.rmjc.org/Coffee_Wagon).

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