

# Stone Hill Amphitheater does 'Republic Undone'

*The Rappahannock News' former publisher, Walter Nicklin, tees up some questions for playwright and producer John Henry in anticipation of the upcoming (May 18) production at his Flint Hill amphitheater, made possible through a RAAC grant.*



Rappahannock News (RN): After seven years of work, you laid the last stone for your Stone Hill Amphitheater in 2016. Since then, it has provided the venue for six plays and three autumn events you call "Spectacles." While the stonework might be seen as a bid for immortality (competing with the enduring works of Neolithic man!), how do you hope the public space you created for theatrical performances is seen?

**John Henry (JH):** The Stone Hill Amphitheater gives Rappahannock County the opportunity to enjoy outdoor theater in a setting that showcases our amazing granite formations. Both stone and citizen theater bring people together. Stone touches us in significant ways that aren't entirely understood. The Greeks invented theater for a didactic purpose.

**RN:** So your current production's title "Republic Undone" even sounds didactic. What civics lesson are you trying to teach?

**JH:** Over the past century, the Constitution died on an installment plan. Someone has to say something. The sacrifices of our ancestors in the American Revolution should not have been in vain. We traded away the Constitution and the world of James Madison — with individuals marching to their own drummer — for the world of Woodrow Wilson, with American military power abroad searching for monsters to destroy.

**RN:** Is this why your play features Woodrow Wilson and America's entry into World War I?

**JH:** Wilson pioneered Presidential wars and started the process of turning us from a Republic into an Empire. He destroyed the "separation of powers" — a structural bill of rights built into the

*"Wilson pioneered Presidential wars and started the process of turning us from a Republic into an Empire. He destroyed the "separation of powers" — a structural bill of rights built into the Constitution to protect us from tyranny."*

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**RN:** What do you mean exactly by a "Presidential war?"

**JH:** Taking the nation from a state of peace to a state of war without a prior Congressional declaration as required by Article I, section 8, clause 11 of the Constitution — the "Declare War Clause." The examples are unfortunately many: Korea. Vietnam. Iraq. Bosnia. Kosovo. Afghanistan. Yemen. Somalia. Libya. Syria. Pakistan.

**RN:** So how does Woodrow Wilson, who actually got a declaration of war from Congress, fit into this narrative?

**JH:** There are so many myths about Wilson and World War I. Congress voted to acknowledge a state of war

initiated by German aggression. It did so based on Wilson's many lies, including denying that munitions were carried by the Lusitania, and insisting that "the 1 percent" were endowed with a sacred right to travel in luxury on armed merchant ships in war zones. Wilson unilaterally abandoned neutrality to aid the Triple Entente — which predictably provoked German countermeasures, which Wilson then exploited to goad Congress into voting a declaration that Germany had already destroyed the peace.

**RN:** We grew up being told Wilson, our fellow Virginian, fought to make the world safe for democracy.

**JH:** Fake news! Wilson fought to fortify the British Empire in which 60 million whites ruled over 340 million subjects who were denied self-determination. Among other consequential things, his willingness to hand Shandong over to Japan to protect white supremacy in the United States created the Chinese Communist Party on May 4, 1919.

**RN:** Stone Hill gives a lot of Rappahannock people the opportunity to display their often otherwise undiscovered thespian talent. Please share their names and roles in "Republic Undone."

**JH:** Howard Coon, who was also featured in my second play "Republic

For Which We Stand," plays French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau and Woodrow Wilson's father. Deverell Pedersen returns for a third time at Stone Hill, as Wilson's mother. Another veteran thespian, Maeve Cuiba, returns as young Tommy Wilson. Peter Stenner, who also acted in my first two plays, returns as Doctor Cary Grayson and Joseph Tumulty. Another third-timer, star singer-actress, Pat Nicklin, plays first cousin Hatti Woodrow and suffragette leader Alice Paul. Our German cast features Sandy Reade as Augusta Victoria, the Kaiser's wife, and John Schmitz as the Kaiser. Hugh Hill is Assistant Director alongside Director Rick Davis, head of George Mason's Performing Arts.

**RN:** What details should readers know about the May 18th performance?

**JH:** It starts at 8 pm. George Mason's Green Machine Band will perform a pre-show assortment at 7. If it rains, the performance will be held, same time, at the Castleton Theater. The Amphitheater's physical address is: 40 Springwish Lane, Flint Hill, Virginia, 22627. Tickets can be obtained online at [republicundone.eventbrite.com](http://republicundone.eventbrite.com)

Finally, I'd like to thank the RAAC Claudia Mitchell Arts fund for its generous grant that helped make this production possible.

## Meetings & Notices

➔ **RAPPAHANNOCK COUNTY FARM BUREAU**, 11929 Lee Highway, Sperryville, will be hosting a free educational event to learn more about Medicare. It will be held this morning (Thursday), May 9, at 10 a.m. Open to the public. Reservations are recommended as seats are limited. RSVP to Ashley Allen at 540-987-8225 or [ashley.allen@vafb.com](mailto:ashley.allen@vafb.com)

➔ **RAPPAHANNOCK COUNTY RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AUTHORITY BOARD (RCRFA)** meets every second Thursday of the month at the Library at 5:30 p.m. The next meeting will be this evening (Thursday), May 9. The public is invited.

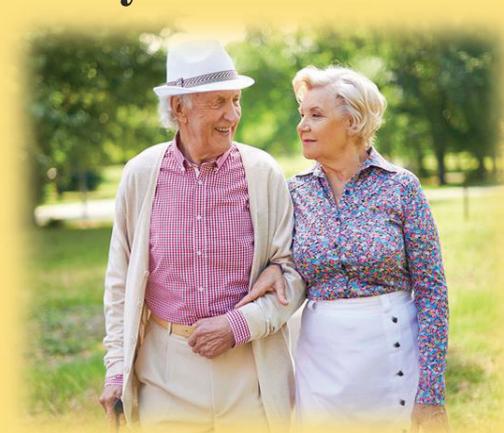
➔ **EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS DAY** is being celebrated tomorrow (Friday), May 10. This is a nationally recognized day of celebration. Please help our county celebrate your child's caregivers and early childhood education preschool teachers.

➔ The **RAPPAHANNOCK COUNTY DEMOCRATIC COMMITTEE** meets on Saturday, May 11, at the Washington Town Hall, 485 Gay Street, Washington. Doors open at 9:30 a.m. for coffee and conversation. Meeting starts at 10 a.m. All are welcome.

➔ The **WASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL** meets on Monday, May 13, at 7 p.m. at Town Hall.

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