Workshop description

With the coming of spring of 1862 and the beginning of the second year of the Civil War, the landscape in and around Harpers Ferry had changed dramatically. The two weapons factories in town were no more, their valuable machinery having been moved south to make arms for the Confederacy. From a pre-war population of some three thousand residents, by April 1862, perhaps only a hundred or so remained. Some had gone north, but many more south, to work in two newly-established armories in Richmond, Virginia, and Fayetteville, North Carolina. And now, on Bolivar Heights, Camp Hill, as well as in the town of Harpers Ferry, Union campgrounds could be seen. These soldiers made up a portion of what the Federals called the “Railroad Brigade,” a force stationed along the extremely important Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Colonel Dixon Miles, who arrived at the end of March 1862, was in command. He would not survive the year.

During our 2012 APUS Teachers’ Institute, we will look at the period April 1862 through March 1863, a year of tremendous importance in the Civil War and the history of our country. Initially in the backwaters of the war, Harpers Ferry and its Federal garrison would by mid-September 1862 find itself caught up in the maelstrom of our national conflict. From a Union “camp of instruction” to a target for much of Robert E. Lee’s Confederate Army of Northern Virginia during the 1862 Maryland Campaign, Harpers Ferry’s fortunes swung back and forth again, as they would throughout the war.

We will look at the civilian story, examine the importance of the railroads during the Civil War, experience what it was like for new Union recruits coming here in 1862, and of course, focus much of our attention on the vitally important 1862 Maryland Campaign, and the subsequent issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation, a document that changed the whole nature of the war.