



THE CAPITAL DISTRICT CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



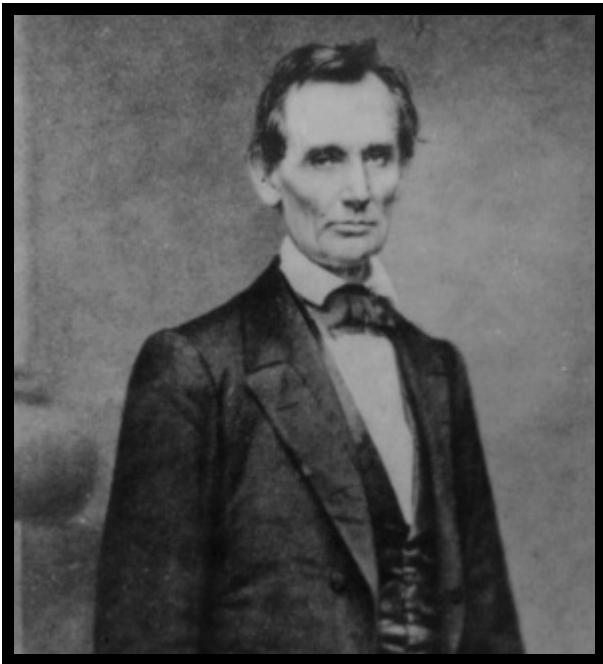
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LINCOLN TO SPEAK AT COOPER UNION



This picture of Abraham Lincoln was taken by Matthew Brady on February 27, 1860, the same day as his speech at Cooper Union, which is shown in the right hand lithograph.

**JANUARY MEETING
FRIDAY, JANUARY 8TH**

Members' Potpourri Night

**Guilderland Public Library
Western Ave. (Route 20) Guilderland**

Social Hour	6:00 pm-7:00 pm
Business Meeting	7:00 pm-7:30 pm
Presentation	7:30 pm-8:30 pm
Q&A	8:30 pm-9:30 pm

CDCWRT MEETING

The next meeting of the CDCWRT will be on Friday, January 8, 2010 at the Guilderland Public Library. This is our members' Potpourri Meeting where members of the Round Table may do short presentations on topics that are special to them. These may include family histories, letters, Civil War memorabilia or Civil War anecdotes. Displays are also included.

Gene Gore will speak about his Civil War relatives. There is a maternal great grandfather and a great uncle who served in the 27th Massachusetts Volunteers. Also serving in the same regiment was his paternal great grandmother's husband (paternal great grandfather) and her father (paternal great-great grandfather). Gene has always been interested in American history, especially Civil War history with his family's involvement. We hope that Gene will diagram his family for this presentation.

Gene was born in Massachusetts. He has a Masters degree from Springfield College in Massachusetts. From 1960 to 2005 he worked in education in a variety of professional positions. He has lived in the town of Bethlehem since 1960 and is married to Round Table member, Alice Turcotte.

Howard Young, re-enactor and collector of military memorabilia, will have a display of historical railroad trains. Howie is a re-enactor for the

American Revolutionary War, Civil War, Spanish-American War and World War I. He has the necessary paraphernalia for this. However he also has model trains, and this is what he will display.

Regina Daly is a member of the Ulster Civil War Round Table but she had worked with CDCWRT at Gettysburg. She holds degrees from Fordham University and Russell Sage College. She has written and published articles about Civil War subjects, but tonight she will speak about her first book. In 2001 she first learned of Ernest Shackleton and his ill-fated polar expedition. She will discuss what qualities in him that captivated her attention and how this led her to a series of trips to England to collect his letters. With this success, she is now starting to research the Confederate Coast Guard.

Her book is entitled The Shackleton Letters: Behind the Scenes of the Nimrod Expedition. She will have copies for sale for interested members. Soft cover books are \$25 and a limited series of 50 hardcover books are available for \$50.

While this is not a Civil War topic, Regina's story is fascinating, and shows how a casual interest in an event can lead to a true quest.

Stephen Muller will talk about his recently published booklet entitled Troy, New York, and the Building of the USS Monitor. This book deals with the people, specifications, contracts and sites where parts for the Monitor were manufactured. Steve will have books available for purchase.

Finally, a new Board will be elected since this was not carried out at the December meeting.. Proposed are:

**President – Matt George
Vice-President – open
Secretary – Mary Ellen Johnson
Treasurer – Fran McCashion
At-Large – Art Henningson
At-Large – Walt Williams
At-Large – Bob Mulligan**

This is just a proposed slate. Any member in good standing (dues paid) may have his/her name submitted for any position at the time of the election.

DUES! DUES! DUES!

Starting January 2010, all members' dues will be due in January as previously announced. That is why there is a dues announcement attached as the last inside page of this newsletter.

BOARD MEETING

A Board Meeting of the CDCWRT was held on December 14th. The treasurer reported \$1089.81 in the regular checking account. There was \$12,085.21 in the preservation account, but expenses for the December banquet have not yet been paid.

The Victorian Stroll netted \$237 for the preservation account. An amount of \$300 has been donated by members as a memorial fund honoring Joe Stracuzzi. The family is planning a memorial service in 2010. The Board has not yet decided where to donate that money but donations from members can be mailed into the CDCWRT marked as Strucuzzi Fund.

Ed Bearss requested that his honorarium of \$250 be donated to Grant's Cottage. Ed also had requested that his \$250 honorarium for the Washington trip be donated to the Sandusky Foundation in Virginia. The Board also voted to donate \$1000 to CWPT for Appomattox Court House, which was a remarkable 115:1 match needed by the end of the year. This means the \$1000 will be leveraged to \$115,000. In addition, another \$1000 donated to CWPT for Chancellorsville is being leveraged 8:1 for a donation of \$8000. Thus these four donations totaling \$2500 have been leveraged to \$123,500.

The results of the survey were presented to the Board. There were 32 returned surveys, and in general 90% were satisfied with present operation of the Round Table. However there were a number of excellent suggestions for future topics and operation. The most pressing was the recommendation to update our website. The Board will consider the suggestions and the membership may see some changes over this next year.

UP-COMING EVENTS

The following list of up-coming events is provided to help Round Table members plan their long term

calendars. These are events that involve our Round Table, especially events that provide opportunities to raise funds for our preservation activities. Some events may change as the year progresses, so members should check the list monthly.

With the present illness of our Program Chair, topics for up-coming meetings are fluid at this time. Several members have volunteered to present topics and the Board is most grateful to them.

Friday, February 12, 2010, is the regular meeting of the CDCWRT. This is also Lincoln's birthday. At present the speaker is To Be Announced.

Sunday, March 7, 2010, is the date that has been set with Harold Holzer as tour guide for the Lincoln Exhibit at the N.Y.S. Historical Society in New York City. Plans are to rent a bus to NYC. Times and costs are being arranged, and details will be in the February newsletter. There are several Civil War exhibits at the Society which should fill the day.

Friday, March 12, 2010 is the regular meeting of the CDCWRT. The speaker is TBA.

Friday, April 9, 2010 is the regular meeting of the CDCWRT. The speaker is TBA.

DECEMBER'S MEETING

I am proud of all of you! The CDCWRT honored Ed Bearss with a banquet attendance of 97 people, and sales of raffle tickets were excellent. Ed once again expressed his opinion about the important preservation work that our Round Table continues to carry out. He decided to regale his audience with the topic of General Daniel Sickles.

At CDCWRT's well attended December 4th banquet Ed Bearss reminded us that Dan Sickles had an Albany connection when he served for a time as a member of the New York State Legislature. Soon moving on, the ambitious Sickles was appointed first secretary to James Buchanan, U.S. Minister in London. Instead of bringing along his young wife, who had recently delivered a baby girl, he was accompanied by New York City prostitute Fanny White whom he presented to

Queen Victoria at Court. His scandalous behavior became known, setting the raffish tone of his life.

A rising politician with an eye on the White House, Sickles was elected to the House of Representatives. Outraged at being cuckolded by his wife and Philip Barton Key, Sickles shot Key in what seems to have been a premeditated crime. Arrested and charged with murder, a legal “dream team” was assembled, and shrewdly managing to get Sickles acquitted on grounds of temporary insanity. Then Sickles further proceeded to flaunt 19th century society’s conventions by reconciling with his unfaithful wife.

Still dreaming of the White House in spite of his disreputable reputation, once the Civil War broke out, Sickles saw winning military glory as a way of overcoming the public’s disapproval. Returning to New York City and raising an entire brigade known as the Excelsior Brigade, Sickles became one of the political generals appointed by Lincoln. He was personally brave on the battlefield, and eventually Sickles was named commander of the Third Corps under the command of Joseph Hooker. The two, along with Hooker’s Chief of Staff Dan Butterfield, were kindred spirits, well known to be hard drinkers and womanizers who earned the disdain and censure of many other officers, among them George Meade. Sickles’s and Meade’s relationship was strained from the start.

At Chancellorsville Sickles’s troops held the high ground at Hazel Grove, keeping Lee separated from Jackson. He protested Hooker’s order to leave the high ground, which he saw as an artillery platform. As soon as Third Corps evacuated Hazel Grove, J.E.B. Stuart moved 26 cannons onto the high ground. Sickles felt the move allowed the Confederates to win the battle and cause the Third Corps’s high casualty rate. The fear of allowing the enemy to occupy the high ground would influence his thinking at Gettysburg. Sickles regretted Hooker’s dismissal after Chancellorsville and disliked his replacement, Meade.

Once Lee’s army marched into Pennsylvania the Army of the Potomac moved north as well. Meade’s reprimand to Sickles over his corps’s slow progress and obstruction of the road further strained the relationship, embarrassing Sickles among his peers. Eventually Sickles’s men arrived

at Gettysburg where Meade ordered them to the left wing of the Federal line along Cemetery Ridge adjoining Hancock’s corps. When Meade sent one of his aides, his son Capt. Meade, to check on the Third Corps position, Sickles pointed out the higher ground of a peach orchard and wheat field near the Emmitsburg Road where Confederate artillery in place could be disastrous to his corps’s lower position. Capt. Meade reported back to his father who again ordered Sickles to remain where initially ordered. Sickles went to Meade’s headquarters only to be ignored by Meade, though Meade did allow artillery officer General Hunt to reconnoiter with Sickles. Hunt could see Sickles’s point, but had no authority to allow him to move his line forward. Behind Herr Ridge and Seminary Hill the Confederates were slowly getting organized for the attack that Longstreet had been ordered to make against Meade’s flank.

Meade should have paid more attention to Sickles who, in defiance of Meade’s orders, had moved his corps out along the Emmitsburg Road to the Peach Orchard, oblique to Houck’s Ridge and then to Devils Den. About this time Meade called a staff meeting. Sickles did not attend until ordered to do so. At his tardy arrival he admitted that he had moved his troops forward and asked Meade if he should move them back again. By then it was too late and Meade had no choice but to order Syke’s Fifth Corps troops to support Sickles. As Longstreet’s men emerged, they unexpectedly found Sickles’s men in place along the road.

July 2nd’s bitter fighting forced the Third Corps to retreat from its advanced position. Hit below the knee in the midst of the fighting, Sickles was carried off the battlefield smoking a cigar. Having had his leg amputated, Sickles was moved by ambulance and rail to Washington, his amputated leg packed in ice. Within days he had Lincoln’s ear, recounting the battle and describing the importance of positioning his troops forward in defeating the Confederates. Lincoln, unhappy that Meade had not ordered the Army of the Potomac to pursue Lee after his defeat, was receptive to Sickles’s version of the battle, that if he had not moved forward, Meade would have possibly retreated. Thus began Sickles crusade against Meade’s reputation.

Soon after the war the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association had been formed to preserve the battlefield. In the 1890's Sickles, again elected to Congress after many decades, convinced the legislature to make the battlefield Federal property, making it the Gettysburg National Military Park. Sickles returned repeatedly for reunions and in later years claimed that the whole battlefield was his monument. He outlived Mead by 42 years, never ceasing to disparage his leadership and handling of the battle.

As Bearss characterized Sickles, he was not a great general, but was certainly an interesting character.

This excellent summary of the meeting was provided by our secretary, Mary Ellen Johnson.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

1. Meanwhile in the South

The southern extension of the CDCWRT will be busy these next several months. At the November meeting of the Rufus Barringer CWRT, Matt Farina presented a program on Civil War Medicine – Myth and Reality. On January 13th he will be presenting a program on Joshua L. Chamberlain at the Moore County Senior Enrichment Center.

For Black History Month in February, Matt has organized a month-long exhibit at the Sandhills Community College that combines a number of themes including, the transformation from slave to soldier, the evolution of Civil War medicine, the buffalo soldiers, and Troy's own Dr. Bontecou. The exhibit includes rare photos authorized by Bontecou, of five black soldiers wounded at the Battle of the Crater, their pension records and their post war histories. This is complimented by a capital amputation kit and other medical paraphernalia including a rare handwritten medical textbook used in the Southwest in the 1870's that details the management of disease using local plants and herbs. The exhibit ends with the history of the Buffalo Soldiers and includes art work by Frederic Remington and modern artist, Bobb Vann.

On February 26th, Matt is presenting to the Southern Pines Rotary, and finally on March 8th he is presenting to the Raleigh CWRT on the topic of the Wounding and Death of Joshua Chamberlain.

2. New Civil War Coins

Representative Todd Platts on Pennsylvania, along with 24 other co-sponsors, introduced HR 3712 in October, to raise funds for the Gettysburg Foundation and the Army Heritage Center Foundation at Carlisle. A limited minting of commemorative coins will be used to raise monies. One hundred thousand \$5.00-gold coins will be minted to sell at \$35 apiece; five hundred thousand silver dollars will be minted to sell at \$10 apiece; and seven hundred and fifty thousand copper-nickle half-dollars will be minted to sell at \$5 apiece. If all coins are sold, the return will be \$12.25 million.

3. Civil War Lectures in NYS Library

The NYS Library will sponsor two free Civil War related programs in January. The noon-day talks will be held in the Librarians Room in the State Library, on the 7th floor of the Cultural Education Center on Madison Ave. (518-474-5355).

A Banner Decade: Ten Years of the New York State Battle Flag Preservation Project

In 2000, the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation initiated a preservation campaign and developed plans for archival long-term housing of the NYS Battle Flag Collection administered by the Division of Military & Naval Affairs. This inter-agency partnership, known as the NYS Battle Flag Preservation Project, is responsible for the flag collection's conservation, storage, research, and interpretation. The year 2010 marks the 10th anniversary of the flag project. Over the last decade, textile conservators from the Peebles Island Resource Center, with assistance from the Flag Project curator, have preserved and placed into temporary storage over 500 flags from the collection and have provided educational and interpretive services for the interested public. Christopher Morton, the Flag Project curator, will discuss the history of the Battle Flag Collection and highlight the Flag Project's accomplishments to date while showcasing a number of interesting and historic flags from the collection.

Thursday, January 14th, 12:15 – 1:15 p.m.

The Edward McPherson Farm and the Battle of Gettysburg

War often has a profound effect on the civilian

population in its path. This talk will examine how the battle fought on the Edward McPherson farm and on surrounding land on July 1, 1863 had a life changing effect on the family that lived on that farm. The talk will make use of primary documents such as census records, personal remembrances, and military accounts to personalize how families in the path of warfare are altered. The focus will be on the antebellum history of the property and how the Battle of Gettysburg changed the rural Adams County of Pennsylvania and its inhabitants. Historian Michael Russert will give this presentation. Friday, January 22nd, 12:15 – 1:15 p.m.

4. Wreck found in 2007 Identified

The **CSS Appomattox** was part of the Mosquito Fleet, a collection of small, armed steamers that defended the northeastern North Carolina sounds. After the Battle of Elizabeth City in 1862, it attempted to escape Federal gunboats by passing through the locks of the Dismal Swamp Canal. The vessel proved too large for the locks, so the Confederates torched the steamer rather than have it captured by the Union Navy. At the time of the burning, the **Appomattox** crew was on loan from the Confederate ironclad, **CSS Virginia**.

The Underwater Archeology Branch, North Carolina Office of Archives and History in the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources had been searching for the wreck for about ten years. In August 2007 divers found a charred wreck in the Pasquotank River. They had worked on seven other boats earlier, only to learn from the Underwater Archeology Branch experts that none of them was the **Appomattox**. But this most recent wreck with a screw propeller and shaft, was very promising.

Among the artifacts recovered was a silver-plated spoon inscribed with “J. Skerritt”, and this was critical in establishing the identity of the wreck. Upon searching the **CSS Virginia’s** crew list, reference was found to sailor James Skerritt. The spoon and other artifacts recovered from the shipwreck eventually may be exhibited at the Museum of the Albemarle in Elizabeth City.

5. Cooper Union Sesquicentennial

It is known that Lincoln penned a letter in the fall of 1859 to Ohio Republican Senator, Thomas Corwin. Two surviving Corwin letters bracket and attest to

Lincoln’s missing letter. The “confidential” letter was held by Corwin descendants and was released in 2005. Corwin’s first letter chides Lincoln for saying in a speech that a moderate Republican presidential candidate would lose Illinois by 50,000 votes in 1860. Lincoln responds with the strongest language he ever used to defend his party’s opposition to slavery.

“Drop that issue, and they (voters) have no motive to remain, and will not remain, with us. It is idiotic to think otherwise. Do you understand me as saying Illinois must have an extreme antislavery candidate? I do not so mean. We must have, though, a man who recognizes that Slavery issue as being the living issue of the day; who does not hesitate to declare slavery a wrong, nor to deal with it as such; who believes in the power and duty of Congress to prevent the spread of it.”

Harold Holzer noted that one can search high and low in the Lincoln corpus for another use of the word **idiotic** --- or more electric proof that on the cusp of his nomination to the Presidency, he was as strongly committed as ever to keeping slavery at the center of American political discourse until it could be eradicated.

Lincoln was unwilling to focus on safer subjects such as **“tariff, extravagances, live oak contracts, and the like.”** He reiterates that there is only one subject worth discussing: **“that Slavery issue.”** Thus Corwin was powerfully rebuked by Lincoln.

About the time the letters were exchanged in 1859, both men received invitations from the Young Men’s Central Republican Union of New York to lecture. Corwin promptly accepted and spoke at Brooklyn’s Plymouth Church. Lincoln hesitated, negotiated, postponed, and finally agreed to come. By then the church’s lecture series had ended. Lincoln was compelled to give his speech at a different venue: the Cooper Union. There on February 27, 1860, he gave the widely reported speech that was perhaps the biggest single factor in making him President.

(This article by Harold Holzer appeared in the February-March 2005 issue of American Heritage.)