

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume LIII, Number 7

Chicago, Illinois

March 1993

Frank L. Byrne on "Civil War Prisons: Myth and Reality"

by Barbara Hughett

More than 150 places were used as prisons by both sides during the American Civil War. These generally could be classified into certain types: fortifications, former jails and penitentiaries, altered buildings, enclosures around barracks, enclosures around tents, and open stockades. The most well-known Civil War prison—the infamous Andersonville, in Georgia—was an open stockade. Over 13,000 men lost their lives there.

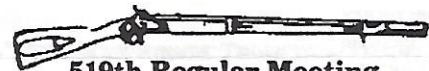


Frank L. Byrne

But Andersonville was not the only prison with high disease and death rates. Poor sanitation and overcrowding, among other factors, contributed to unhealthy conditions at many prison camps—South and North. A Confederate soldier who had been imprisoned at Camp Douglas, on the South Side of Chicago, wrote of his experience there: "... there was absolutely nothing to do but to brood over our positions, bewail our lots, catch the taint of disease from each other, and passively abide in our prison-pens.... we were soon in a fair state of rotting, while yet alive." A former prisoner in North Carolina's Salisbury Prison called it "a scene of suffering and death which no pen can adequately describe."

Have the deplorable conditions of life in Civil War prisons been exaggerated by their former inmates? Frank L. Byrne will address this question on March 12, when he speaks to The Round Table on "Civil War Prisons: Myth and Reality." He will discuss the persistent charges of deliberate mistreatment of prisoners by both sides in the Civil War and the controversial historical literature concerning this issue.

In his talk, Byrne will offer alternative explanations for conditions in both Union and Confederate prisons and will relate them to other aspects of the war. He will associate prison conditions with the controversy over prisoner exchange and tentatively tie the latter controversy to the conduct of the war. Demonstrating the similarities between myth and reality, Byrne's address will represent a preliminary report on the research he has been doing in preparation for a general history of Civil War prisons.



519th Regular Meeting

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Frank L. Byrne on "Civil War Prisons: Myth and Reality"

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Friday, March 12

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Holiday Inn Mart Plaza
350 North Orleans Street
Buttons—15th floor

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.
\$20.00 per person

Entree: Boneless Stuffed Chicken Breast,
Orange Roughy, or Fruit Plate



A Reminder

Please make your reservation by Wednesday, March 10. Mail the enclosed postcard or call the book shop at (312) 944-3085.

If you are driving and coming from the south, turn left into the Mart Plaza lot just after crossing the river on Orleans. From the north, turn right from Orleans on Hubbard, left on Kingsbury, right on Kinzie, and left into the Mart Plaza lot. Parking is free.

A native of Hackensack, New Jersey, Byrne is a graduate of Trenton State College and received his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He has been on the faculty of Kent State University since 1966, and has also taught at Louisiana State University and Creighton University.

Byrne is the author of *Prophet of Prohibition: Neal Dow and His Crusade* (1961), as well as articles on temperance and Civil War topics. He is the editor or coeditor of several publications, including *Haskell of Gettysburg: His Life and Civil War Papers* (1970) and *Your True Marcus: The Civil War Letters of a Jewish Colonel* (1985).

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Founded December 3, 1940
 357 West Chicago Avenue
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The only requirement for membership in The Round Table is a genuine interest in the Civil War and its era. For information, address Dan Weinberg, 357 W. Chicago Ave., Chicago, IL 60610.



The Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin will hold its fifty-third annual meeting and dinner on Sunday, April 18, at 6 p.m. at the Milwaukee Yacht Club. The featured speaker will be William Hanchett, whose topic will be "John Wilkes Booth and the Terrible Truth About the Civil War." The cost per person is \$20, and reservations must be made by April 16. For additional information and to make reservations, call Steven Rogstad at (414) 634-0114.

BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION

☆ UPDATE ☆

By David Richert

"Preserving Virginia's Civil War Heritage" is the title of a conference that the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table will hold in Fredericksburg, Virginia on March 27-28. Discussion topics will include current issues, legislative actions, methods of protecting Civil War sites, correcting misunderstandings about preservation, and working within the community to protect historic sites.

Among the speakers are A. Wilson Greene, Executive Director of The Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites; Maria Burks of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park; Jay Monahan of the Stonewall Brigade Foundation; David Brown of the Preservation Alliance of Virginia; and Catherine Gilliam of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. James M. McPherson will speak at the banquet Saturday and Robert Krick will lead a bus tour of Chancellorsville battlefield. For information, call (703) 373-1672.

Pamplin Park update. We reported last month that a ceremony to dedicate the entrance road, parking lot, and interpretive trail at the Pamplin Park Civil War Site near Petersburg, Virginia would be held on April 2. Will Greene, executive director of APCWS, which is developing the site, has informed us that Mr. Pamplin has changed his mind about dedicating a portion of the park this April. Instead, he has instructed APCWS to go forward with construction of the Interpretive Center along with the rest of the site development for one grand opening on April 2, 1994.

A lawsuit by preservationists seeking to prevent a gravel mining company from destroying a portion of the Malvern Hill battlefield near Richmond has been dismissed. The judge ruled that the plaintiffs did not have legal standing to sue. The suit was filed in 1991 against the Henrico County Board of Zoning Appeals. West Sand & Gravel of Richmond ultimately plans to excavate 350 acres within a 700-acre tract abutting the Malvern Hill unit of Richmond National Battlefield Park.

West maintains that nothing of historical importance happened on the land to be excavated. The Park Service says, however, that the area is "the heart of the battlefield." The Park Service is hopeful the review process that West still faces may provide an opportunity to derail the mining plans. Another option would be for the federal government to condemn the land, which technically is within the park's legislative boundary.

Also within park boundaries but privately owned is a fifty-one-acre site at Gettysburg that the owner wants to turn into a 200-site campground with snack bar, bath house, lodge, and parking for 500 vehicles. The land, the Kern farm, is west of the Emmitsburg Road near South Cavalry Field. The owner wants to expand his Battlefield Heritage Resorts, located on the east side of Emmitsburg Road outside the park boundary.

An appraisal of the land has been done and the Park Service plans to offer the owner an amount reflecting "the highest and best use of the property." The money would come from funds appropriated by Congress to acquire land and easements in accordance with the 1990 park boundary expansion.

❧ FEBRUARY MEETING ❧

by Larry Gibbs

What happened to George Armstrong Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn? This is a most inexplicable and enigmatic question. How does one separate the reality from the myth of G.A. Custer? On February 12, Brian Pohanka took on this task when he spoke on "Custer's Last Stand: The Battle of Little Big Horn Reexamined." He addressed 152 members and guests at the 518th regular meeting of The Civil War Round Table.

G.A. Custer was a popular cadet at West Point in spite of graduating last in his 1861 class. He rose rapidly during the Civil War to the rank of brevet major general. Although fearless in battle, Custer was impulsive while in command.

After the Civil War, he and many of his fellow Union officers went West to fight Indians. He was court-martialed for leaving his command post to see his wife Libby. Pohanka stated, "Custer was trying to recover his damaged reputation at Little Big Horn." Others have suggested that his rashness may have been fueled by political ambition in the form of presidential aspirations.

In June of 1876, three columns of soldiers were to converge on the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians in southeastern Montana. Lieutenant Colonel G.A. Custer and 600 soldiers of the Seventh U.S. Cavalry were sent ahead on June 22nd. The largest contingent of Indians (8000) met the twelve companies of soldiers at noon on June 25. Custer desired to surround the Indian village and split his forces into three sections.

Major Marcus A. Reno took his three companies to attack the southern end of the village while Captain Frederick Benteen followed with supplies. Reno's men were routed and fled to the bluffs on the east side of the Little Big Horn. Joined by Benteen, Reno and his command were under siege. Reno then realized that Custer was in trouble.

Meanwhile, Custer and his 209 soldiers were fighting for their lives. At first, Custer's strategy was to attack the Indian village from the north while Reno attacked from the south. Pohanka stated, "Custer's major fear was that the Indians would scatter into the wilderness. It never occurred to him that he might be routed." Reno and Benteen made a feeble effort to aid Custer, but they fell back to their besieged position. The 210 men in Custer's command perished on Custer Hill.

In 1983, a fire on the battle site allowed archaeologists to have a series of digs. With forensic evidence, historians obtained more knowledge of the battle from artifacts and skeletal remains. The evidence indicated that Custer had 210 soldiers (not 215), because five graves were deemed spurious. All of the soldiers were dismembered and had their skulls crushed. According to the location of artifacts on the battlefield, Custer did not try to cross the river at the ford near the village. Also, no soldiers committed suicide. Several companies scattered as panic set in. Archaeologists and anthropologists were able to determine the identities of several soldiers by employing a process known as "facial reconstruction," which involves the superimposing of remnants of the skulls which have been unearthed onto pictures of the individuals.

Surprisingly, the Indians had a decided advantage in terms of arms and strategy during the battle. Pohanka estimated that many Indians had rifles, and thirty Indians used Henry Repeating Rifles. The Indians were on foot,

circling Custer's men in small groups. When the horses fled or died, panic set in. The swarming Indian tactics were very effective. The number of Indian deaths was only thirty-five to fifty. Custer recognized his hopeless plight too late. With no help from Reno and Benteen, "Custer's Last Stand" became a historic reality.

Throughout the presentation, Pohanka made effective use of slides to drive home his points. He made specific references to the use of art in depictions of the "Last Stand." "I don't think that there is any battle in American history that has been the subject of so much art as the Battle of Little Big Horn," claimed Pohanka. However, the art is usually historically inaccurate. Indians are generally shown on horseback, using only bows and arrows. Pohanka contends that these popular ideas of the battle are very misleading and mistaken.

Round Table Trustee Robert Girardi addressed The Leadmine Civil War Round Table in Galena, Illinois, on January 21. His topic was "The Battle for the River Crossing at Fredericksburg." Girardi also spoke at Xavier College on January 28 on "The Common Soldier in the Civil War."

The Kankakee Civil War Round Table is sponsoring its second annual Civil War symposium on April 3, at the Howard Johnson's Lodge in Bradley, Illinois. The symposium begins at 9:30 a.m. and will run until 5 p.m. The cost is \$40, and a luncheon buffet is included. Among the scheduled speakers are William C. Davis, John Hennessy, and James Vlazny. To make reservations, call Steve Goodknecht at (815) 939-3568.

The South Suburban Civil War Round Table is sponsoring a dinner meeting on Sunday, April 25, from 4 till 8:30 p.m., at the Mary Todd Cafe in Frankfort, Illinois. Armin Weng will deliver an address on "Six Mistakes at Gettysburg." For further information, call Larry Gibbs at (708) 957-4662.

John Y. Simon, The Round Table's 1985 Nevins-Freeman honoree, will speak to The Civil War Round Table of The District of Columbia on April 28. His subject will be "From the Wilderness to Cold Harbor: Ulysses S. Grant's Bloody Ordeal."

The Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW) has recently been reactivated in Illinois. The SUVCW is actively involved in the preservation of Civil War records, gravesites, battlefields, memorials, and genealogical information. Any male descendant, age fourteen or older, of someone who honorably served in the armed forces of the United States of America between 1861 and 1865 is eligible for membership. For additional membership information, contact David C. Bailey, 1569 Marquette Avenue, Naperville, Illinois 60565.

Blue and Gray magazine recently received the 1992 John Newman Edwards Award in recognition of "the best coverage of Confederate and Southern subjects by various media." The award, named for a former Confederate soldier and reporter, is presented by the Military Order of the Stars and Bars, a Southern historical organization.

The New Books

Compiled by C. Robert Douglas



- Rosenburg, R.B., ed. *"For the Wake of my Country": The Diary of Col. W.W. Ward, 9th Tennessee Cavalry, Morgan's Birigade, C.S.A.* Southern Heritage Press, P.O. Box 1615, Murfreesboro, TN 37133, 1992. \$23.00; pbk. \$14.99.
- Sears, Stephen W. *To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign.* Ticknor & Fields. 1992. \$25.00.
- Shea, William and Earl Hess. *Pea Ridge: The Civil War Campaign in the West.* U. of North Carolina Press. 1992. \$29.95.
- Simpson, Harold B. *Brawling Brass: North and South.* Hill College Press, P.O. Box 619, Hillsboro, TX 76645. 1990. \$12.00. Original of 1960.
- Sutherland, Daniel E., ed. *Reminiscences of a Private: William E. Bevens of the First Arkansas Infantry, C.S.A.* U. of Arkansas Press. 1992. \$30.00.
- Symonds, Craig L. *Joseph E. Johnston: A Civil War Biography.* W.W. Norton. 1992. \$24.95.
- Trulock, Alice R. *In the Hands of Providence: Joshua L. Chamberlain and the American Civil War.* U. of North Carolina Press. 1992. \$34.95.
- Turner, Edward R. *The New Market Campaign.* The New Market Military Museum, P.O. Box 1131, New Market, VA 22844. 1990. \$25.00. Original of 1912.
- Wallace, Willard M. *Soul of the Lion: A Biography of Joshua L. Chamberlain.* Stan Clark Military Books. 1992. \$27.50; pbk. \$15.00. Original of 1960.
- Walther, Eric H. *The Fire-Eaters.* LSU Press. 1992. \$39.95.
- Wheeler, Richard. *Lee's Terrible Swift Sword: From Antietam to Chancellorsville, An Eyewitness History.* Harper Collins. 1992. \$30.00.
- Wills, Garry. *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America.* Simon & Schuster. 1992. \$23.00.
- Wills, Brian S. *A Battle from the Start: The Life of Nathan Bedford Forrest.* Harper Collins. 1992. \$30.00.

The history of The Round Table, *The Civil War Round Table: Fifty Years of Scholarship and Fellowship*, by Barbara Hughett, is available for \$30 per copy. You may purchase the book at the monthly meeting or order it from Morningside Bookshop, 260 Oak Street, Dayton, Ohio 45401 (1-800-648-9710). Add \$2.50 for postage and handling.

Schimmelfennig Boutique

In addition to The Round Table history, the following items are available at each monthly meeting:

Lapel pins \$3.00 each, two for \$5.00

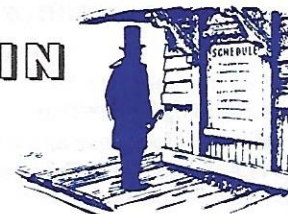
Mugs \$2.00 each, two for \$3.00

Meeting tapes \$7.00 each

Civil War Buff posters \$10.00 each

Proceeds from the sale of these items go to support the programs of The Civil War Round Table.

BULLETIN BOARD



FUTURE MEETINGS

Regular meetings are held at the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 North Orleans Street (Buttons, 15th Floor), the second Friday in each month, except as noted.

March 12: Frank L. Byrne on "Civil War Prisons: Myth and Reality."

April 16: Carol Reardon on "The Image of Pickett's Charge in American History." (Please note: this is the **third** Friday of the month.)

May 6-9: Annual Battlefield Tour—Vicksburg.

May 14: William Piston on "Clio and the General: James Longstreet and the Writing of Southern History."

June 11: Frances Kennedy on "Community Benefits of Battlefield Preservation"

New Members

David Beach, 405 N. Wabash #5008, Chicago, IL 60611, (312) 565-0087

Pete Brown, P.O. Box 797687, Dallas, TX 75379, (214) 612-1168

Joseph Compell, 2406 Leyden, River Grove, IL 60171

Allen S. Goldman, 1411 N. State Parkway, Chicago, IL 60610, (312) 751-1411

Delmon Grapes, 350 E. Woodland Road, Lake Bluff, IL 60044, (708) 295-2636

Neville Keller, 1514 Jonquil Terrace, Chicago, IL 60626, (312) 465-4399

Ileene-Marie Mooney, 6624 W. Imlay, Chicago, IL 60631, (312) 792-8930

Donald Schuette, 577 Plum Grove Road #113, Roselle, IL 60172, (708) 924-0305

James Schwade, 969 S. Chicago, Kankakee, IL 60901, (815) 939-9638

June Tate, 900 Oakton Street, Evanston, IL 60202, (708) 493-9833

Round Table Trustee Robert Dawson spoke to the Waukegan Historical Society on February 18. His topic was "The Sixteenth Illinois Infantry: An Undistinguished Regiment Distinguishes Itself."

Garry Wills, author of *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America* (1992), was the recipient of the fifth annual Lincoln Group of New York Award of Achievement. The award honors the person judged to have done the most during the previous year to advance the study of or encourage the appreciation of Abraham Lincoln.

Developers are considering three Atlanta-area sites for a \$30 million "Gone With the Wind Country" theme park, to be built in time for the 1996 Olympics. Georgia Holdings, Inc. has an exclusive licensing option from Turner Home Entertainment, which owns the rights to the movie "Gone With the Wind."