

Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

November, 1998

NEWSLETTER

Editor: George Slaton

THE CIVIL WAR IN DEPTH
A Slide Presentation by Bob Zeller
And
NINETEENTH CENTURY WILMINGTON THROUGH THE
STEREOGRAPHER'S EYES
A Slide Presentation by Jonathan Noffke

St. John's Episcopal Church
Thursday, November 12
Social Hour 7:00 pm..... Program 7:30 pm

Bob Zeller is the author of the highly acclaimed *The Civil War in Depth*, the first 3-D photographic history of the war ever published. Many Civil War buffs have been unaware that the greatest Civil War photos were created in 3-D. The book includes a dozen Civil War photos never before published. It features the first war combat photos ever taken and includes a chapter on Abraham Lincoln in 3-D. *The Civil War in Depth*, which comes complete with a 3-D viewer, was published by Chronicle Books in October, 1997, and is in a fifth printing, with 60,000 copies in print. Zeller is currently at work on *The Civil War in Depth, Vol. II*, to be published by Chronicle in the fall of 2000.

Zeller is one of the leading private collectors of original Civil War photography. Three pieces from his collection were featured in the Smithsonian Institution's exhibition on Matthew Brady in Washington, Boston and New York in 1997 and 1998. He had his own one-man show at the Southeast Museum of Photography in Florida in 1995.

Bob Zeller is a native of Washington DC and a graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism. From 1976 to 1980, he was an investigative reporter at *The Clarion-Ledger* in Jackson, Mississippi and from 1980 to 1990 at *The Press-Telegram* in Long Beach, California. From 1991 to 1998, he covered the NASCAR Winston Cup series as a motorsports writer for Landmark Newspapers. He's been involved with well-received biographical studies of NASCAR drivers Mark Martin, Jeff Gordon, and Rusty Wallace. He lives in Pleasant Garden, NC.

Jonathan Noffke, the Director of the Bellamy Mansion Museum, will provide a special treat for everyone interested in Wilmington history. A number of photographers were actively recording stereoviews of Wilmington scenes in the 1870's and 1880's. Jonathan will present a slide program developed from the current exhibition of Wilmington stereoviews at the Bellamy Mansion Museum.

Members are invited to come early and socialize before the 7:30 pm program. As always, feel free to bring guests with you. Our RT programs on Civil War photography have always been popular.

! MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS AND SIGNUPS NOW DUE !

If you've not yet paid your \$25.00 membership dues for the 1997-1998 year, please submit them as soon as possible. You may pay Dan Geddie, Treasurer, at the next RT meeting or mail to Cape Fear Civil War Round Table, Box 10535, Wilmington NC 28404 (note new zipcode).

ROBERT E. LEE'S CIVIL WAR Book Review

(Kemp Burbeau, who penned this review, was one of the founders of the Cape Fear CWRT. His astute comments on Lee will be appreciated by our members. Kemp, a local attorney, recently completed his M.A. in U.S. History from UNC-Wilmington. Reprinted with permission from *The Civil War News*)

To some commentators, Lee was a virtually infallible military genius, especially competent on the offensive, who could only be defeated by a vastly superior, well-equipped army. In *Robert E. Lee's Civil War*, Bevin Alexander presents Lee as a general whose tactics were still mired in the absolute Napoleonic tradition.

The Confederate commander is especially faulted for his frontal assaults at Malvern Hill, Gettysburg and the Wilderness, apparently failing to learn from comparable Northern and Southern errors such as Burnside's attack on Marye's Heights at Fredericksburg. Being a descendent of Lee, this reviewer will make a good faith effort to maintain objectivity having provided such a disclaimer of self-interest!

Alexander asserts that Jackson, not Lee, was master of the attack. Relying on Stonewall's adept use of the flank attack, Lee did well at Second Manassas and Chancellorsville. Yet without his able lieutenant, Lee uncreatively reverted to archaic frontal assaults almost doomed to failure given the odds favoring the defensive due to the deadly impact of concentrated rifle fire, artillery (especially canister and grape shot), and protective earthworks.

Alexander acknowledges Lee's skills, but says the attributes were best exhibited on the defensive, consistent with Longstreet's notions, and not on the attack as customarily believed. Alexander apparently feels Lee bled the Army of Northern Virginia with his costly frontal offensives, lacking the finesse offered by Jackson-style flanking. Nevertheless, he also criticizes Lee for not abandoning Richmond prior to being forced to do so by Grant, indicating the Confederate army could have then enjoyed offensive mobility rather than suffer the ultimate, virtually inevitable defeat entailed in trench warfare.

Despite Alexander's studied and insightful criticisms, Lee's tactics perhaps can be defended. From Malvern Hill through Pickett's Charge and the Wilderness, Lee did undertake frontal attacks. Although costly, these attacks did either force the Union armies to withdraw or at least temporarily jolted them off balance. Such tactics were consistent with the Confederate commander's not unreasonable belief that the South needed a quick victory, obtainable only by an offensive capable of dampening the Northern will to continue the war.

Lee knew a war of attrition would be difficult for the South to win, and accordingly only undertook a defensive stance in 1864-65 when compelled to do so due to limited food supplies for men and beast, and inadequate transportation.

As to criticism of his frontal charges, Lee was as competent as his contemporaries in that regard, with Sherman having his Kennesaw Mountain, Grant his Cold Harbor, and World War I generals their many comparable blood baths. Moreover, Lee should not be condemned as a bureaucratic detail general for not embracing guerilla war.

With justification, he recognized that such a black flag total fight to the death would engender generations of active hatred between the North and South, while taking untold additional lives and further devastating the Southern countryside and cities. Lee rightfully perceived that only a government relatively able to defend its territorial integrity would be acceptable to Southerners as an alternative to surrender. Unlike the Revolutionary era, by the mid-19th Century, guerrilla warfare was not an acceptable option to most Americans.

Bevin Alexander's work is a brilliant, provocative work challenging both the scholar and enthusiast to rethink the generalship of R. E. Lee. The author provides clear, insightful, well-documented discussions of Lee's campaigns. He is to be especially commended for his perception that Lee recognized that slavery was the ultimate divisive element in North/South relations and that an equitable, democratic reunion would be possible upon abolition of that odious institution.

Readers are advised to ponder this finely written, comprehensive, and controversial book. Whether readers agree or disagree with Alexander, they will surely find this bold consideration of Lee's military ability most rewarding. (*Robert E. Lee's Civil War*, Bevin Alexander, Adams Media, 1998)

SAVE THE SUSQUEHANNA CHARTS

At the October meeting, Chris Fonvielle spoke to the membership about the significance of the U.S.S. *Susquehanna* map charts which the Friends of the New Hanover County Library are currently raising money to preserve and display at the main library branch. The charts were originally used by Commodore Sylvanus W. Godon whose U.S.S. *Susquehanna* participated in the Union naval blockade along the coast of the Cape Fear region and saw further action in the attacks on Fort Fisher. The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table has committed to match up to \$500 in donations from individual RT members toward the \$7000 the Friends are seeking to raise. Members' contributions are fully tax deductible and can be forwarded to Beverly Tetterton, New Hanover County Library, 210 Chestnut Street, Wilmington NC 28401.

You will have an additional opportunity to make your contribution to the Friends' campaign at our meeting on Thursday, November 12. We hope that you'll assist the Round Table in making a large contribution to save a part of Cape Fear Civil War history.

SPRING BUS TOUR TO ANTIETAM

Fifteen members have already signed up to journey by bus to Sharpsburg, Maryland in March, 1999 for a two-day tour of Antietam and nearby South Mountain battlefields! An excellent tour guide has already been engaged to lead our group. Those of you who have attended our previous spring tours know how much fun these events are. Walking the ground with a knowledgeable historian is so much more rewarding than seeing a battlefield alone. And, of course, the fellowship is an added benefit!

You must sign up for the tour by December 1, 1998! The transportation and trip details will be planned around those who sign up. The group will also select a March weekend for the trip. So don't tarry on this one. See or call Dan Geddie (H. 799-5338) for a sign-up form and register for another unforgettable spring battlefield tour.

THE BATTLE OF PICKETT'S MILL A Report from the Field

In early May, 1864 USA General William T. Sherman started his three armies - the Army of the Cumberland, the Army of the Tennessee, and the Army of the Ohio - from Chattanooga, Tennessee toward a prize goal, the important city of Atlanta. Resisting his advance was CSA General Joseph E. Johnston's Army of Tennessee. Sherman succeeded in outflanking his opponent after a series of engagements and, within a few weeks, had progressed south through north Georgia to an area just west of Marietta. Here the Dallas-New Hope-Pickett's Mill Line became the site of severe confrontation between Johnston and Sherman.

At the urging of RT members, Jim McCallum and Wayne Carver, I recently visited the battlefield at Pickett's Mill. It's a wonderful site! Acquired by the state of Georgia in the 1970's, this 765 acre historic site very closely resembles the field as it appeared in 1864. Well-marked trails lead from the visitor's center into the area where bitter fighting took place. The trails, in fact, lead the visitor chronologically through the sequence of combat from the beginning to the close of the battle. Certainly, Pickett's Mill is one of the best preserved Civil War battlefields in the country.

Hapless USA General Oliver O. Howard planned to flank the Confederate defense lines with his 4th Army Corps. Little did he know that CSA General Patrick R. Cleburne had carefully aligned his troops in two lines of entrenchments and his artillery in similarly well-conceived positions. Three furious attacks by Union troops not only failed to dislodge their foes, but resulted in 1600 casualties; CSA losses were 500. The fighting in a large ravine, featured in the walking tour, where USA General W.B. Hazen's brigade was trapped, was especially intense.

This is a gem of a battlefield an easy hour's drive northwest of Atlanta! Contact Pickett's Mill Battlefield State Historic Site, 2640 Mt. Tabor Road, Dallas GA 30132, 770-443-7850.

A PARTING SHOT

Ralph Geoffrey Newman
1911-1998

(The Civil War community recently sustained a great loss in the death of Ralph Newman, for he was the founder of The Civil War Round Table movement. It was Ralph Newman who invited a few friends to gather at his Abraham Lincoln Bookshop in downtown Chicago on December 5, 1940, to start a Civil War discussion group which later evolved into The Civil War Round Table of Chicago, whose members we joined on the battleship last May. Now, there are nearly 300 Round Tables across the country! Unfortunately Mr. Newman, because of a serious illness, was unable to accompany his friends to Wilmington for that recent field trip.

Ralph Newman was an internationally known rare book and manuscript dealer as well as an accomplished Lincoln scholar. He appraised the papers of six U.S. presidents. The Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, Mark Neely, once said, "He has been at the hub of Lincoln interest for over five decades." Ralph Newman led a varied and productive life, as the following excerpts from his memorial service on August 2, 1998 reflect)

Eulogy by Dr. John Y. Simon

I knew Ralph Newman for more than half a century, and he never ceased to amaze me. He was an American original, a self-made man, and a public relations master. His fabulous career defied imagination...and one had to know him to believe in his reality.

Like many other bookmen, Ralph Newman drifted into business by chance. After graduating from high school in 1929, he attended Crane College for one year without finding anything there that interested him, then worked in a downtown bank until he discovered that nobody missed him when he left one afternoon to watch a baseball game. One year at Northwestern University provided little beyond two free summers to play minor league second base for Tucson and Wichita.

Returning to Chicago, he stumbled across an old, well-stocked bookstore that had succumbed to the Depression and was for sale cheap. He approached friends in the bank for money to buy it, but could get the money at usurious interest only on condition that he apply all receipts to the loan until it was repaid. Newman immediately slashed prices so drastically that rival booksellers staggered out of his shop with armloads of books and crocodile tears for the young man's ignorance. In a few weeks, however, Newman had repaid his loan and still had eighty percent of his stock.

With \$500 of additional borrowed capital, Newman opened his own bookshop in 1933 on Lincoln's birthday in the *Chicago Daily News* building. The date was coincidental; Newman planned to sell a general line of second-hand books. The course of the enterprise was altered, however, by two employees of the *Daily News* who became regular customers: Carl Sandburg and Lloyd Lewis. Sandburg had already published the first two volumes of his Lincoln biography and was preparing four more; Lewis, author of *Myths After Lincoln* and a biography of Sherman, was beginning to focus on General Grant. Newman added Lincoln and Civil War stock to accommodate them and attracted more Civil War customers. In 1940, he abandoned his general line and renamed his enterprise the Abraham Lincoln Bookshop. As the shop became more specialized, it took on the characteristics of a club of Civil War enthusiasts. In 1940, these bibulous bibliophiles organized The Civil War Round Table. So loyal were Newman's customers that they ran his shop for him while he served in the Navy during World War II.

...Some people came as tourists to visit the only bookshop included in a guide to Civil War sites. Old friends came to socialize, prompting the frequent lament, "I ought to sell drinks and give books away." Genuine customers, sometimes dismayed that books bore no prices, waited until the boss reluctantly assigned one. If those prices caused dismay, the boss intoned that "It'll never get cheaper," a prediction verified by time.

In 1962, Newman joined Civil War Centennial cronies in founding a Ulysses S. Grant Association, co-signing a bank note for initial funding. For 28 years he served as the Grant Association's president, and all its publications are a credit to his steadfast patronage of history. He brought vigorous, resourceful, and imaginative leadership to each of his historical activities. Those skills gave him an honored place on the dais at many gatherings where, during after-dinner speeches, he habitually fell asleep and never missed anything important.

As his hearing worsened, Mr. Newman developed a disconcerting habit of ending telephone conversations by hanging up the phone without saying goodbye or giving others that chance. We have met here today to say goodbye.

Remarks by James Nethery, President, The Civil War Round Table of Chicago

I'm the new kid on the block. I discovered the Civil War and Ralph Newman only about ten years ago, and I became president of The Civil War Round Table about a month ago. So I am the new kid on the block and the smart thing for the new kid to do is to talk with those who have been there before. So I talked with some of the past presidents to see what the Round Table should do. I thought we might say thanks to Ralph for the many things he has done for the Round Table, beginning with its creation 58 years ago; I thought we might say thanks for sharing his knowledge with us. I can tell you that one of the first things I did after joining the Round Table was to take a tour, led by Ralph, of the Lincoln sites in Springfield and for me that was truly a memorable occasion.

But then I talked with Joe Wiseheart, one of our past presidents, who said, "Yeah, you could say all that, but what Ralph gave me was some of the best friends I have." I thought that was right on the mark. Ralph gave us each other, the members of The Civil War Round Table. So for all those things, and especially for that - for giving us each other - for creating the Round Table family, on behalf of the more than 400 members of The Civil War Round Table of Chicago, I say, "Thank you, Ralph."

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