

Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

May, 2000

NEWSLETTER

Editor: George Slaton

HIDDEN BENEATH THE WAVES An Overview of Civil War Naval Activities in North Carolina

May 11 Meeting
St. John's Episcopal Church
Social Hour 7:00 pm.....Program 7:30 pm

Richard W. Lawrence began working with the Division of Archives and History in 1975 at the Underwater Archeology Unity (UAU) in Kure Beach. In 1976 he was made a permanent member of the staff as an underwater archeologist and in 1981 he was promoted to archeological supervisor. Richard has a B.A. in Anthropology from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Over the past 25 years, Richard has been involved in a variety of projects throughout the state and has investigated hundreds of underwater archeological sites which have included prehistoric canoes, colonial sailing vessels, numerous Civil War shipwrecks, and coastal and river steamboats. Richard was among the first divers to explore the *USS Monitor* in 1979. Thirty-nine lockout dives were made on the wreck from a four-man submersible, resulting in the establishment of an on-site baseline, excavation of a five-foot-by-five-foot test square, photographic documentation, and recovery of archeological artifacts. In 1993, he directed the Cape Fear River Comprehensive Survey. Over ninety shipwrecks were documented, from the city of Wilmington to the river's mouth, including two Confederate ironclads, a blockade runner, and numerous steamboats, work boats, and barges.

In 1996 a private research group discovered a shipwreck in Beaufort Inlet thought to be Blackbeard's flagship *Queen Anne's Revenge*. Since that time Richard has been involved in all phases of research and management for that site and he serves on its advisory committee.

Under Richard's direction, the UAU has continued to expand its historical and archeological database and increase its services to the public and to governmental agencies. Over 3000 square feet of lab and storage space have been added to the UAU facilities at Fort Fisher, and in 1989 an underwater archeology exhibit was opened that attracts approximately 80,000 visitors every year.

Richard's program will cover Civil War era shipwrecks, including blockade runners, the CSS *Raleigh* and *North Carolina*, naval actions in the sounds and rivers of NC's central and northern coast, and the *USS Monitor*.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The Nominating Committee is proud to present a slate of new officers for election at the May 11 meeting! Additional nominations may be made from the floor. The slate includes:

Chris Fonvielle, President
Mike Budziszewski, Vice President
Bob Cooke, Steering Committee
John Moore, Steering Committee

THE SOUTH'S MOST POPULAR CITIZEN VISITS WILMINGTON One Hundred and Thirty Years Ago

In March, 1870, just months before his death, Robert E. Lee began a last tour of the South. What was originally conceived as a vacation to restore his health turned out to be a very public tour by rail with stops in a number of Southern cities. Great, cheering crowds gathered at train depots along the route, even in towns and cities where Lee was unable to stop. Fortunately for the citizens of Wilmington, Lee paused here to spend a day and night in late April. Following are excerpts from the *Wilmington Daily Journal*, April 29-30, 1870.

"Telegrams were received in this city yesterday announcing the fact that General Lee would arrive here from Charleston on the Southern train last night. A special train was arranged, through the courtesy of Colonel Fremont, the Superintendent, to start from the depot of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad for the accommodation of those who wished to greet the great ex-chieftain upon his arrival. This train started at 8 o'clock, and proceeded to Meares Bluff - there to await General Lee's arrival, having on board a large crowd of friends and the Cadets of the Cape Fear Academy, under charge of General Colston.

After some time spent in waiting, the train from the South arrived, and General Lee, by invitation, came to the special train. A suppressed whisper of admiration, respectfully restrained, first greeted his approach. There were only a few in the car at the time, but soon the curious crowd who had rushed outside to catch the first glimpse of the noble General and hurried and thronged around his seat. The corps of Cadets were on the platform and received him with arms presented, while the band played an air. We think that General Lee was affected by the sight of the grey worn by the Cadets, which no doubts called forcibly to mind many recollections of the days when "old Marse Robert" was held in such veneration and confidence by the thousands of noble and manly hearts which beat beneath many a grey jacket. But the demonstration seemed not altogether pleasing to him. The gratifying news soon spread through the car that General Lee had determined to stop here, but would probably leave tonight. On the arrival at the depot the Cadets formed in line and proceeded to escort him to the residence of Honorable George Davis whose guest General Lee is. From respect to the feelings of the old warrior, no further demonstration which people might otherwise wish to desire to make was insisted on, but the Cadets headed the crowd in a march downtown, and General Lee was left in peace. (4/29)

Thousands of friends and admirers of the man who possesses the devoted affection of his own people and the admiration and respect of his former enemies, availed themselves of the privilege of visiting the sterling old patriot at the residence of Honorable George Davis yesterday. It was a reception which truly did the heart good. No formal demonstrations, no sycophantic protestations, but purely and simply the homage of hearts overflowing with veneration and true affection, with humble and unselfish reverence of the noble representative of a past made glorious by deeds of romance and heroic sacrifices - a people forgetting the present and memory reverting to the past were enshrined and embodied in this ever faithful leader of the armies. However strongly the hearts of our people may have previously inclined and clung to General Lee this feeling could be but increased and a most favorable personal impression created by his manner of receiving those who called yesterday. There was a tender warmth and cordiality in the grasp of his hand, a gentle dignity in the form of greeting and due regard for feelings and appreciation for attentions which will ever be remembered. None could fail to be charmed with delight and the popular heart here swells with increased emotion at the name of General Lee.

The General will take leave of our city today. He leaves on a special train this morning, accompanied by his daughter, on his return home, but will probably stop in Richmond. We regret that he could not have been here longer, but are pleased that we have at least seen this much of him and seen him so favorably." (4/30)

*Note. George Davis, a former Attorney General of the Confederacy, was a Wilmington attorney after the war. His home in 1870 was on Second Street between Red Cross and Walnut Streets.

SABRE STROKES

We were delighted to host Dr. Francis Carroll at the April meeting. He introduced us to the intricacies of the "British Intervention During the Civil War." Many of our members participated in the raffle, and the winners were: Ray Martin (Relic Box from the Cape Fear Civil War Shop), Dick Covell (Civil War Centennial Stamps from Wilbur Jones), Clayton Callaway (Bruce Catton's *Grant Takes Command* from John Krohn), Wayne Carver (Civil War broadside from the Cape Far Civil War Shop), James McLaren (NC cupholder from the Cape Fear Civil War Shop), and Robert Batchelder (Gabor Borritt's *The Gettysburg Nobody Knows* from Mary and Palmer Royal). Raffle total was \$115.00! Thanks especially to Linda Rand and Mary Royal who prepared and brought some delicious refreshments for our members to enjoy! We're very grateful to Bernice and Wayne Carver who have coordinated the refreshments at our meetings this year.

Our members, especially those who attended the Christmas Open House at the Bellamy Mansion in December, will want to know that *Southern Horizon*, the wonderful period vocal and instrumental group which presented a stirring concert of Civil War music, has just released its first CD. "Do They Miss Me At Home?" features seventeen songs. The CD (\$15) or the cassette tape (\$10) plus \$2 shipping can be ordered directly from John C. Robison, 2207 Wren's Nest Road, Richmond VA 23235, (804) 320-4680, Email: MINSTRAL@aol.com. The group's web site, www.southern-horizon.com, lists a full description of the new release.

The December newsletter reported the merger of the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites (APCWS) with the Civil War Trust into a new and enlarged Civil War preservation organization known as The Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT). In retrospect, the merger appears to have been more a takeover of APCWS by the Trust. Some frustration and grief, as well as resentment, has been expressed by longtime members of APCWS, a popular and effective grass-roots organization which was founded in the late 1980's. Your editor, an ardent supporter of APCWS, has made some inquiries over the last few months about the transition and current status of the CWPT. It seems that one of the primary reasons for the merger was that some influential members of Congress have been insisting that the Civil War preservation movement achieve greater unity and cohesion before committing more federal funds for saving battlefields. It is thought by many that a larger national organization will prove to be more effective overall. Many former APCWS members are taking an optimistic wait and see attitude.

The CFCWRT Annual Spring Tour in March to sites of the Bermuda Hundred Campaign near Chester VA was once again a great experience for all who attended! Mark Jacobson and Jerry Netherland were very enthusiastic guides to a battleground which has been significantly urbanized. The visit to Pamplin Park, the site of the Union breakthrough at Petersburg in April, 1865, was a delight as well. The park preserves the section of CSA breastworks held by Brigadier General James H. Lane's brigade of North Carolinians. Those attending the tour were Tommy King, Dan Geddie, George Wolf, Ed Mahoney, Richard Triebe, Mike Budziszewski, Bob Quinn, , Jim McCallum, James McLaren and guest, Owen Hardy of Louisville KY, Palmer and Mary Royal, Bert and Ellen Williams and their guest, Jim Brandon of West Palm Beach FL, John Moore, and George Slaton. Our special thanks to Tommy and Dan for planning and executing another enjoyable tour.

Congratulations to Chris Fonvielle whose *Fort Anderson: Battle for Wilmington* has won the coveted Clarendon Award from the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society! This marks the third time Chris' work has achieved this award. The award presentation at the Latimer House on Sunday, May 7, at 1:30 pm and Chris' lecture shortly afterwards at 3:30 pm on Fort Anderson at the Cape Fear Museum are open to the public. For those of you who want a limited (500), numbered, and signed copy of the hard bound edition of the book, they will be available at our May 11 meeting.

Congratulations also to RT member, Richard Long, who has taken the editorship of the monthly newsletter of the local George Davis Camp No. 5 of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. It's entitled *The Cape Fear Defender*.

RT members who attended our Annual Spring Tour to the Seven Days Campaign near Richmond VA in 1997 may be interested to learn about the improvements at the Gaines' Mill and Malvern Hill

battlefields. The trail at Gaines' Mill which leads around to the Union left has been extended now to the area where Brigadier General Cadmus Wilcox's Alabama brigade assaulted the Federal defenses. An attractive stone marker commemorating Wilcox and his troops has recently been erected. At Malvern Hill, a loop trail has been blazed which encircles the battlefield. Additional guide markers have been placed at various points along the trail. Of particular interest is the marker in front of the ruins of The Parsonage indicating the area where Wilmington native, Colonel Gaston Meares of the 3rd North Carolina, was killed by Union artillery fire.

As you know, the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table breaks for the summer. During that time, the Steering Committee will be working to put together a program schedule of Civil War topics and speakers for the 2000-2001 year which begins in September. We look forward to seeing each of you then!

A PARTING SHOT

(Willie Morris, one of the preeminent Southern writers of our generation, grew up in Yazoo City, Mississippi, a small town about which he has written with warm affection. Though Morris, who lived in New York City for some years while he edited *Harper's Magazine*, often commented on the faults and foibles of Southern culture, there was never any doubt that he was always drawn towards his native region. The following excerpt, describing his visit to Gettysburg to deliver the commencement speech at Gettysburg College, is taken from his *New York Days*, Little, Brown and Company, 1993)

...I stayed with a college family who every year planted a large vegetable garden in the back of their house, where they frequently dug up minie balls and shell fragments; recently they had found a rusty old belt-buckle with "CSA" on it. The chairman of the history department took me on an afternoon's tour of the battlefield, my first visit to that most American of terrains. Late that night, against the park regulations, I drove my car over there and got out. I had the place all to myself. It was springtime and the grass was heavy with dew. The fireflies were out, and rabbits and squirrels bounced haphazardly among the monuments and artillery pieces. In a spooky half-moon I wandered around Little Round Top, Big Round Top, Devil's Den, and the Wheatfield, then paused at the crest of Cemetery Ridge and gazed across at the rounded green valley where the Charge had been, and its dreadful harvest of death. A handful of Mississippi boys in the first wave had made it into these final embattlements, but they had not lasted too long, and I remembered the lingering fealties and funny contradictions of one's boyhood, and history arrested and suspended for me in that one hushed moment before that majestic and dismembering assault. The quiet earth before me left me breathless with lonely sorrow and understanding. I thought of the nation now in that year of 1968, the terrible brevity of its attention spans, and what this heuristic ground must have meant to it, or not meant to it at all.

Suddenly, from around a bend, came a car, its blue lights flashing. It came to a halt. A park policeman got out. He examined me from a distance with a flashlight.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "It's midnight." Did he think I might be the last surviving Mississippian, still tarrying here on Cemetery Ridge after all the years?

"I don't know why I'm here, officer. It was compulsive.

"I'm supposed to take you in, you know."

"Well, I'm giving the commencement speech at the college tomorrow. Can you let me off on good behavior?"

"Okay, okay," he said brusquely, yet not without a trace of amusement. "But try not to come in again after dark, will you?" I was about to get in my car when he addressed me again, "It happens all the time," he said. "And it's always Southerners. Why always you Southerners?"

"But I'm an American now, officer," I replied. "I promise I am," and after a whimsical and rather tender silence we both laughed.