



The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

The *RUNNER*

Newsletter of The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

Editor Bob Cooke

December 2006





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The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table was treated to a very special evening on November 9, when we met at the **Cape Fear Club** for our annual dinner meeting.

The venue was elegant (we were treated to the more intimate setting of the downstairs dining room) and the food, as usual, was outstanding.

Of course, the reason for the gathering was neither the food nor the historical setting but rather to hear the presentation by **Kevin P. Duffus**, *The Lost Light The Mystery of the Missing Cape Hatteras Fresnel Lens*. For an hour, following dinner, Kevin unraveled the mystery of what happened to the first-order Fresnel lens that had been removed from the Cape Hatteras Light.

It was the summer of 1861. The Federal Navy, realizing the importance of the lighthouse system on the Carolina Coast, began military action to capture and control the all-important navigational lights as part of what was to become the Northern Squadron Blockade. The Confederates, also realizing the importance of the lights, took action to remove the light lens and thus render the lights inoperable.

Kevin Duffus began his quest as a young boy of 17. It took over 30 years for him to locate and document what happened to the first order Hatteras lens. Oh yes, the Federal Navy ultimately replaced the first order lens with the more common second order Henry-Lepaute lens (The first order Cape Lookout lens was replaced with a third order lens) all of which may well have contributed to the destruction of the Burnside fleet, off Cape Hatteras in January of 1862 which included the loss of the *USS Monitor*.

The lens, being a series of finely ground glass prisms, had an interesting journey. Properly wrapped, the lens would fill a boxcar, thus it became a Herculean task to conceal such a load. Indeed, the lens was split in order to more easily conceal their existence. For the next 140 years, the Federal Lighthouse Service, historians and enthusiastic lighthouse researchers sought to locate

the lens. The journey included an icehouse in Tarboro, select individuals to whom individual lens had been sold for \$35 and finally, and most appropriately, to the newly built Hatteras light.

It was an intriguing and most interesting journey for **Kevin Duffus** and for us as he told his story in a well illustrated most interesting and compelling manner. Our November meeting was most memorable and one, this reporter, is glad he did not miss.



Most of us are aware of what happened at Fort Fisher and the who, what and when related to Blockade Runners and the Northern Blockade Squadron.

How many of us know what was happening in our hometown of Wilmington from 1861 through to the fall of our fair town in the early spring of 1865?

Wilmington, once the Capitol of North Carolina was a bustling seaport before the Civil War. It became critical to the success of the Confederacy, once the blockade became effective along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts.

Attend our 7 December Round Table and learn more about the local events of that traumatic era. Our own **Bob Cooke**, who is writing a book on the subject, will weave a story of intrigue, and some personalities as he describes the War in Wilmington, 1861- 1865.

The registration desk opens at 6:00 PM; refreshments (supplied by our new food guy Charles Watson) and Social Hour begin at 7:00. The program begins promptly at 7:30.

Please note that we are meeting the First Thursday in December (rather than the second) in order to avoid conflicts with Holiday parties. Please try to attend. This is one presentation you do not want to miss.

Bruce Patterson



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