



The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

The *RUNNER*

Newsletter of The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

Editor **Bob Cooke**

January 2008

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Our speaker for the New Year will be **Andrew Duppstadt**, who will speak to us about the expedition to capture the U.S.S. *Underwriter*. Mr. Duppstadt, who is well known to many of our members, is the Assistant Curator of Education as well as the Historic Weapons Program Coordinator for all North Carolina Historic Sites. He is also president of the Eastern North Carolina Civil War Round Table (Jacksonville) and secretary of the North Carolina Civil War Tourism Council. A graduate of UNCW (Andrew has a BA and an MA in history), Andrew is now based in Kinston at the C.S.S. *Neuse* site.



We were presented with a dual speaking arrangement at our December meeting! Kicking the meeting off, Chairman **Ed Gibson** showed us via his laptop and a wonderful power-point presentation on the various (upwards of several million) sites. Starting off with our own RT web site and showing how to maneuver around the links, he took us through some great web sites, including the National Park Service (for a listing of most soldiers and sailors), National Archives, Pennsylvania records- you see, Ed's interest in the Civil War began when he discovered that his great-great grandfather served in the 147th Pa. Infantry. We were taken on virtual tours of the National Civil War Naval Museum, Grant's

Tomb, the battlefields of Manassas, Gettysburg, Fort Fisher, Bentonville and Bennett Place; the

SCV and SUVCW sites were not ignored either! We went traveling via the Civil War Traveler's maps and photos, to the Museum of the Confederacy and the GAR Museum (where resides the head of "Old Baldy", mascot of a Pennsylvania unit). When we returned home, (still rested!) Ed mentioned that many of the sites could be used for genealogical research as well.

Turning the program over to RT president **David Norris**, we were treated to a philatelic history of the Confederacy. "Every stamp tells a story", and our story began at Charleston. With the firing on Fort Sumter, the breach between the States had come. Or had it? Even after the outbreak of war, the U.S. Post Office was still sending mail South, while the Postmaster at Charleston was forced to nail the mailboxes closed because people there were still using them! After a brief history of the U.S. Mail system, it was back to 1861, May 21 to be exact. In the South, that was the date set for the last use of U.S. stamps. As early as January 1861, the Confederacy had its own Postal system, under its own Postmaster General John H. Reagan.



Throughout 1861 however, there was a dire lack of stamps throughout the country; local postmasters began to make their own stamps until October, when the first batch arrived from Richmond. During the war, the soldiers lament was often, "send stamps!"

Stamps were ordered from abroad and the first stamps brought in came via the *C.S.S. Nashville* to Beaufort. Many other runners were not so successful. Captured stamps became souvenirs for the offshore naval crews. Some of those that got into the country bore the likeness of President Jeff Davis and the story of Davis being approached by a soldier as he walked the streets. The soldier gazed at Davis and asked, "Are you Jeff Davis? You look like a postage stamp!" Davis was not the only figure to be immortalized in that manner. Likenesses of George Washington and Stonewall Jackson were also used.

Davis also informed us that it was during the Civil War that home delivery of mail began. Prior to that, the letters remained at the post office and people would drop in to see if they had mail. Postmasters also cancelled mail; many times by using home made hand stamps made of corks from wine or medicine bottles ("postmasters had a lot of time on their hands"). As the war dragged on and coins became scarce, stamps were often used as currency. Delving into the postal system a bit further, David told us why postal carriers, bidding on routes, often bid so low that the routes were unprofitable to them. Mail carriers were exempt from military service, so while the carries were not making money, the Post Office Department was!

Mail also increased dramatically during the war. In 1860, citizens received an average of five letters per year, but when the war started, a vast number of letters went to and from soldiers at the front. Patriotic covers appeared during the war, more so in the North; in the South, paper was folded and used as envelopes ("covers" in philatelic terms!) Mail could, of course, be sent North or South via Bermuda or the Bahamas. Inserted in an outer envelope, the smuggled letter would be addressed to a "drop" in the Islands where it would be opened and sent via a steamer to the recipient. Rounding out a wonderful presentation, David also touched upon the various express companies as well as revenue stamps (on such items as photos, checks, financial documents, patent medicines, powers of attorney and even the lowly friction match!) which were introduced in the North and garnered one million dollars per year for the government.

The Confederate Signal Service At Wilmington.

Recently (15 November 2007) there was an article about the Confederate Signal Corps in *The Long Roll*, the newsletter of the Piedmont Civil War Round Table (from *The Confederate Soldier in the Civil War*). At the close of the article, it mentioned that the Service, very active on all fronts throughout the conflict, was also quite active here in Wilmington. It is reported that the lighthouse at Price's Creek was a signal station as was Fort Fisher's Mound Battery:

An indispensable condition to the prolongation of the war was the running of the blockade...by the swift cruisers built...expressly for the purpose.... No life could be more adventurous and exciting than that of a blockade-runner. The Signal Corps played its part also. Every blockade-runner had its signal officer, furnished with signaling apparatus and the key to the secret cipher. The coast was lined with stations for thirty or forty miles up and down on either side of the blockaded port. The blockade-runners came in close to shore at nightfall and fitfully flashed a light, which was soon answered from the shore station. Advice was then given of things off the port, the station and movements of the hostile fleet, etc. If the word was "go in" the beacon lights were set and the...runner boldly steamed over the bar and into the port. A naval officer was in charge of the office of orders and details at the several ports, whence proceeded all orders and assignments in relation to pilots and signal officers.

In Wilmington, during the course of the war, there were several officers involved in securing both pilots and signal officers for the many runners reaching the port. One of the most significant soldiers to be stationed in the Cape Fear area was John Baptist Smith, who arrived at Fort Fisher in July 1862. Smith, a native of Caswell County, invented a much-improved system of signaling vessels at sea. Prior to this, signal officers relied on flags (by day) and torches (at night). Aboard ship, waving torches around in the wind and spray was difficult at best. Smith's system used a pair of old ship lanterns. He later wrote: "One day while in the Ordnance Department of the Fort, I chanced to spy a pair of shipboard starboard and port lanterns, and

this thought flashed into my mind, 'Why not by the arrangement of a sliding door to each of these lanterns, one being a white, the other a red light, substitute flashes of red and white lights for the wave of torches to the right and left, to form a signal alphabet and thus use the lanterns at sea as well as upon land.' I at once communicated my plans to Col. Wm. Lamb.... They met with his approbation and I was instructed to submit them to General [W.H.C.] Whiting...who most readily [aided] in fitting up my lanterns." Smith, recognized by Richmond for his achievement, was assigned to General Whiting, who in turn allowed Smith to choose a vessel upon which he wished to serve. Smith picked the S.S. Advance and performed the duties of Signal Officer aboard the State-owned steamer until February 1864, when he was commissioned and sent back to Virginia. Smith later wrote: "[My system of] signaling by flash lights so impressed a British Ship Captain...that he urged me to go to England...and take out letters patent.... I declined his...offer...although...[it] would have been a source of great profit..., as it has formed the basis of the present [1896] system now used in the Naval service.

By 1864, Lieutenant (later Captain) George C. Bain was in command of the Signal Corps. While most of his men were quartered at Smithville (Southport) he maintained an office at Wilmington and telegraphed his orders down river. Under his command were the Lanier brothers Sidney, (well-known for his music as well as his poetry) and his brother Clifford. The men, transferred to the Signal Corps after seeing action in the Seven Days Battles, were eventually sent to Southport

for blockade-runner duty. In August, 1864, Mary White, daughter of North Carolina's Commissioner in England (John White) was at Southport awaiting the next available runner. While there, she wrote:

Aug. 19, 1864 - Smithville, N.C. Last night we had a most delightful serenade. The serenaders were a Mr. Everett and his violin, and two Mr. Laniers...one with a flute and the other a guitar.... They played... very spirited waltzes. Aug. 20, 1864 Last night our serenade was repeated but one of the strings on the serenader's guitar broke and we didn't have many tunes.

The last Mary White saw of her troubadours was the following evening when "the serenader's" were on duty near her hotel. Sidney Lanier would be assigned to go out on the runner Anna in December and, captured by the U.S.S. *Santiago de Cuba*, wound up in Point Lookout. While in prison, Lanier continued to play the flute that he had concealed "in his coat sleeve" Lanier would later compose poems, many of which were based on his wartime experiences.

Colonel Lamb, in command at Fort Fisher, lavish in his praise for many of those in the Corps, had occasion to report an incident at Fort Anderson. In late August, 1864 the C.S.S. *Tallahassee*, fresh from her highly successful foray against Northern shipping (she scuttled or burned over thirty vessels) reached safety and anchored under the guns of Fort Fisher. Shortly afterwards, the vessel weighed anchor and steamed towards town. As the *Tallahassee* followed the channel upriver, she passed directly in front of Fort Anderson on the west bank of the Cape Fear River. Suddenly a shot rang out and an officer aboard was wounded. A few days later, an irate Colonel Lamb telegraphed headquarters about the "want of vigilance on the part of the signal corps at Ft. Anderson." His signalman had tried to contact Fort Anderson to alert that post of the arrival of the raider, "but could not for some reason call the signal station at that point. Owing to this inattention the ship was fired at ...by the sentinel.... Such neglect should not go unpunished."

Another young Signal Officer, Private J.M. Royall, of Virginia was suffered the fortunes of war. After having been through fifteen engagements in Virginia and having been wounded twice (Bull Run and Chancellorsville) he was transferred to the Signal Corps. In June 1864, as his vessel, the *Old Dominion* approached the safe haven of Wilmington; Royall exchanged signals with Fort Fisher's Mound Battery. Suddenly she was spotted and fired upon. Royall, "was down below, drinking a cup of tea in the steward's pantry. While there, a shell burst over him, and 'took off his head as clean as a whistle.'" Royall was only twenty-two years old and was one of the very few fatalities among the elite Signal officers aboard blockade runners.

There was also the story of the Stevenson brothers, Daniel and James. Daniel was aboard the runner *Little Hattie*, struggling to outrun the several U.S. Navy steamers chasing them. He mounted the paddle box and began signaling to the station at Fort Fisher. Soon, the guns of the fort began throwing missiles back at the warships, forcing them to back off from New Inlet. That presented an opportunity for the runner and she took it! Soon safe within the harbor, it was realized that Daniel had been exchanging signals with his brother James, also a signal officer!



Raffle Winners!

Al Hines - A Year in the South 1865, Jack McGarrie - Gettysburg, Palmer Royal - Glorious Cause, Ed Gibson - Hallowed Ground, Gene Jones - Burnside Bridges -

