

The *RUNNER*

Newsletter of the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

Editor Tim Winstead

******* January 2013 *******

Our next meeting will be **Thursday, 10 January 2013** at St. Andrew's On-the-Sound (101Airlie Road). Social Hour begins at 7:00 p.m., meeting at 7:30.

Please join us as we continue our Program Year with our first meeting of the New Year. Visitors are always welcome. Each of our speakers is selected to enlighten, entertain, and add to our knowledge of Civil War history. This serves our purpose of encouraging education and research into that historic conflict.

******* January Program *******

Yellow Fever: “Wagon-load of Corpses”

Join us on January 10th as **David Rice** shares the story of the yellow fever epidemic that decimated Wilmington during the fall of 1862. Rice, who leads tours at Oakdale Cemetery, relates the experiences of many of the residents of this city during the time of “yellow jack.”



David Rice at Oakdale Cemetery

David Rice, Director of the New Hanover County Health Department, is a 35-year health care professional who daily deals with infectious diseases that impact a community. His unique qualifications make his presentation a little different than just the historical facts that surround this facet of Civil War Wilmington.



Yellow Jack

Yellow Fever: “A perfect reign of terror...”

Union-occupied New Bern had its own battle with “yellow jack” during the fall of 1864. A typical summer of heavy rains and high temperatures provided the perfect conditions needed for disease to flourish in and around the town and soldier camps. General Benjamin Butler was met by ‘an awful stench’ as he approached the town.

From the *Tryon Palace* Summer 2011 issue:

On provost duty in town, the men of the 15th Massachusetts remained busy trying to keep streets and sewers clean. When it came to odor, New Bern was fighting a losing battle. Strong southwest winds in August drove the waters of the river out, leaving extensive and smelly mud flats baking in the hot sun; a new embankment ordered by military authorities was being dug along the Neuse River, turning up and exposing large quantities of filth-saturated soil and adding to the panoply of unpleasant odors.

For the most part, these summer days passed slowly as soldiers coped with drills, duty and camp life, and townspeople labored under the ambivalence and uncertain loyalties that accompanied “enemy” occupation. Yet soldiers and citizens all shared one sentiment: as one chronicler of the 5th Rhode Island Heavy Artillery recalled, “The one desire of all grades of soldiers, and all classes of civilians seemed to be to get away from New Berne during the heated term.”

Just a few short weeks later, the formerly bustling town would resemble a scene from a horror novel. Day and night, haze and acrid smoke from numerous tar and pitch fires enveloped its streets, sending black columns skyward. Public life ground to a halt, businesses and churches closed their doors, family and friends abruptly stopped socializing. Parents died and children were left orphaned. Residents died alone in

their homes, their bodies lying unclaimed. Everyone who could leave fled, trying to stay ahead of a capricious enemy who struck with no mercy. “Yellow Jack” had arrived in New Bern and he was on a killing spree.

Nicknamed “Yellow Jack” for the yellow flag or “jack” flown by infected ships under quarantine, yellow fever is a viral illness transmitted to humans by the bite of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. To spread the disease, a mosquito has to bite a person already infected; when the mosquito bites and then infects another person, the disease is carried from human to human. As the number of bitten individuals multiplies, an epidemic is born.

Source: http://www.tryonpalace.org/pdfs/palace_magazine_summer_2011.pdf (accessed December 28, 2012).

******* Raffle Winners *******

Raffle Master: Ed Gibson

Got extra books? Cleaning out your Library? Downsizing? Or just making room for more books? If you have books, prints, or other items that you would like to donate to the CFCWRT raffle, see Ed Gibson at our next meeting.

November Meeting:

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|--------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| <i>Gods and Generals</i> (DVD) | - | Linda Lashley |
| <i>The Barefoot Brigade</i> | - | Clayton Ziggler |
| <i>War on the Waters</i> | - | Martha Watson |
| <i>Covered with Glory</i> | - | Martha Watson |
| <i>Gore Vidal</i> | - | Linda Lashley |

******* Trivia Question for January *******

- 1 – How is yellow fever spread?
- 2 – What is the suspected way that yellow fever arrived in Wilmington during the fall of 1862?
- 3 – Who was the first Wilmington victim of the yellow fever?
- 4 – When Isaiah Respass was on trial for treason in Richmond, his son, John R. Respass, was named acting Lieutenant Colonel of what organization? What was the defendant’s explanation of his son’s actions?
- 5 – After the war, Respass was sued by some business partners involved in a deal gone bad. What was Respass’ defense against his partner’s claims?
- 6 – The three oldest State Archives in United States are in which states?

******* Member News *******

If you have member news that you think would be of interest to CFCWRT membership, let me know about it.

1 – Happy New Year!!!!!!! The New Year gives each of us a chance to reflect on the past and to look to the future. During the bleakest days of the Civil War Abraham Lincoln shared his hopes for the coming new year, “**We must think anew, and act anew.**” To the members and guests of the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table, I hope that each of you is able to follow Abe’s advice.

2 – The following quests attended the December 13th meeting: **Carolyn & Bill Lewis, Marilyn & Ron Gunther, Clayton Zigler, and Mary McLaughlin.** We hope each enjoyed their experience and hope that they will return soon.

3 – Fort Fisher – January 19: Sheppard’s Battery: Defending the Left Flank, Saturday 10 am - 4 pm. Fort Fisher's 148th anniversary program will focus on the Confederate defenders at Sheppard's Battery and around the "Bloody Gate" on the left flank of Fort Fisher. Civil War re-enactors will set up displays of camp life, and talk with visitors about the life of the Confederate infantry and artillery troops during the January 1865 campaign. Visitors will enjoy Civil War authors, artillery demonstrations, and infantry demonstrations. Admission is free, and open to the public.

4 – Travel Opportunity! The Civil War Round Table of Greater Boston announces their 32nd Annual Battlefield Tour of great American Historical Sites. Tour guide, Dale Floyd, will lead a four day visit to Chancellorsville to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the battle that may have been Lee’s greatest triumph. The May 9-12, 2013 tour includes 3 nights lodging, the motorcoach, two boxed lunches, two evening meals, etc. Cost is \$555 (double room occupancy) and \$599 (single room occupancy). Contact David L. Smith: cwrtmass@comcast.net or 781-647-3332.

Editor

******* January 1863 *******

January 1863 saw arguably the most important non-political act of the American Civil War. On January 1st 1863 President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Declaration that abolished slavery throughout America. To many in the Confederacy, this was seen as an open attack on the perceived way of life in the South and any chance of peacefully bringing the American Civil War to an early end based on diplomacy vanished with the Emancipation Declaration.

January 1st: President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Declaration. Burnside accepted responsibility for the defeat at Fredericksburg and offered to resign. Lincoln told him to reconsider.

January 2nd: The Confederates suffered a defeat at Stone’s River, Murfreesboro. They lost a total of 14,560 killed, wounded and missing. However, the North also suffered major losses with 11,578 killed, wounded and missing. This, along with appalling weather that made the movement of troops and horses all but impossible, meant that The North could not follow up its success.

January 5th: The defeat at Murfreesboro gave the North control over much of Tennessee though Confederate raiding parties were a continual problem in the state.

January 10th: The French government made it clear that it was willing to mediate in the war should the government in Washington wish it to do so.

January 11th: A Union force commanded by General McClelland captured Fort Hindman on the Arkansas River. Nearly 4500 Confederate troops were taken prisoner.

January 13th: McClelland was ordered to blow up Fort Hindman as it had no strategic value to the Unionists.

January 16th: The Confederate commerce raider 'Florida' evaded a Union blockade and slipped out of Mobile Bay. In the next 18 months the 'Florida' sank fifteen Union ships, mostly off the waters of the West Indies.

January 19th: General Burnside made preparations to move the Army of the Potomac against Richmond.

January 20th: It soon became clear that the Army of the Potomac was in no fit state to campaign. Snow had turned to heavy rain and the barracking arrangements simply were not good enough. Many men fell ill due to the conditions they lived in; food was poor, water frequently unsanitary and the whisky that was provided of dubious quality. One senior Union officer wrote: "I have ridden through a regimental camp whose utterly filthy condition seemed enough to send malaria through a whole military department, and have been asked by one colonel, with tears in his eyes, to explain to him why his men are dying at a rate of one a day."

January 21st: A rainstorm that lasted 30 hours made a crossing of the Rappahannock River extremely hazardous. However, Burnside had to do this if he was to reach Richmond.

January 22nd: Burnside gave up on trying to cross the Rappahannock River as it had become too dangerous. Frustrated that he had not been given all the support he believed he should have got from his senior officers, Burnside decided to sack a number of them.

January 24th: Burnside met with Lincoln and gave him a list of those he wanted dismissed. Burnside told Lincoln if he did not get the support of the President, he would tender his own resignation.

January 25th: Lincoln removed Burnside from his command of the Army of the Potomac. The post was given to General Hooker. Burnside was very supportive of the President's decision as he had always felt that he was out of his depth and he offered Hooker his full support and loyalty.

January 26th: ‘Fighting Joe’ Hooker formally took charge of the Army of the Potomac. Whereas Burnside had never been confident about his ability to command a whole army of 100,000+ men, Hooker was fully confident about his own ability.

January 28th: Hooker was told that desertions in the Army of the Potomac were at 200 men a day, nearly 1500 a week or 6000 a month. Hooker had to stem this but it was a serious problem. He was also not popular with senior officers, as he had played a major part in undermining General McClelland’s position when McClelland was commander of the Army of the Potomac.

Source: <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/january-1863-civil-war.htm> (accessed November 7, 2012).

***** **January 1863 Continued** *****

As the evening of December 30, 1862 settled onto the countryside outside of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Union General William S. Rosecrans and Confederate General Braxton Bragg and their combined armies of 83,000 men faced each other in what would become a battle for control of central Tennessee. As a prelude to the battle that was to follow, the bands of both armies dueled as each played to drown out the other. When one band struck up “Home Sweet Home,” the mood of all present on that field changed as the other band joined in the refrain. For a short while, the men of both armies came together with thoughts of home and family.

At dawn on December 31, Braxton Bragg ordered the Confederates forward. The Battle of Stones River played out over two days. In total, more than 23,000 Union and Confederate soldiers were killed, wounded, missing or captured. After initial success, the Confederates were met with a withering artillery fire which blunted the rebel attacks. Bragg withdrew his battered army from the field after two additional days. Rosecrans had gained the victory.

A Confederate soldier wrote of the battle:

I am sick and tired of this war, and I can see no prospects of having peace for a long time to come, I don’t think it will ever be stopped by fighting, the Yankees cant whip us and we can never whip them, and I see no prospect of peace unless the Yankees themselves rebel and throw down their arms, and refuse to fight any longer.

The war would continue for more than two years before the men who survived would return to their “Home Sweet Home.”

Editor

Source: <http://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/40stones/40facts1.htm> (accessed December 16, 2012).

***** **January 1863 Continued** *****

Wilmington’s own, **John Newland Maffitt**, made his presence felt by Union merchant shipping after he took the Confederate commerce raider, CSS *Florida*, past the blockading Union navy guarding Mobile Bay. Maffitt had previously made a daylight run into Mobile in September 1862 with an undermanned crew and with himself sick with chills and fever. The *Florida* was

badly damaged, however, Maffitt, with considerate assistance from Admiral Buchanan and Jefferson Davis, was able to refit and re-crew the *Florida* for its January 1863 return to the sea.

On January 11, 1863, Maffitt steamed the *Florida* out Mobile Bay, anchored off Fort Morgan, and waited for bad weather to cover his escape. The Federal fleet consisted of three ships in September had grown to thirteen in January. Maffitt waited for a violent storm and on the evening of January 15 the worsened conditions of a storm erupted to limit visibility. Maffitt waited until 2:00 a.m. and headed for the bar. The *Florida* buffed its way past several Federal ships. Only the fast U.S.S. *R.R. Cyler* realized the ship among them was not another Federal warship. The *Cyler* picked up the chase and closed the range on the *Florida*. Maffitt used the approaching darkness to elude the *Cyler* and gain the open seas.

From January 15 until August 23, 1863, the *Florida* waged commercial war on the Union's high seas commerce. Maffitt exhibited daring and skill during the *Florida's* first voyage. The *Florida* ranged the ocean from Mobile, north to the New York coast, south to Brazil, and east to Brest, France. Maffitt and his resourceful crew captured twenty-three ships with an estimated value in excess of \$3,727,000. By the time the *Florida* put into Brest for needed repairs, Maffitt's health was broken and he was replaced by Commander Joseph N. Barney.

Editor

Source: <http://cfcwrt.com/maffitt.html> (accessed December 12, 2012).

***** December Program *****

Three Times a Traitor: Mayor Isaiah Respass and the Civil War Occupation of Eastern North Carolina

Eastern North Carolina residents, especially in those areas that bordered the coastal sounds, favored the Constitutional Union Party and its candidate, John Bell of Tennessee in the 1860 presidential election. Many were former Whigs who supported the ideas of the old Whig patriarch Henry Clay who had favored federally funded internal improvements that aided the growth of commerce and navigation. They believed that their rights and privileges, both commercial and property, would best be protected by the Constitution and within the Union. They adopted a "wait and see" attitude about president-elect Abraham Lincoln. Until the secession crisis culminated in the fall of Fort Sumter in Charleston, the pro-Union citizens in North Carolina had voted down the call for a secession convention. Once Lincoln called for volunteers to suppress the rebellion, there remained little hope that North Carolina residents would be able to keep tight the ties to the Union of their forefathers.



Chris Meekins

For those in attendance at our December 13th meeting, **Chris Meekins** laid out the remarkable story of a man who played, with cunning and resolve, the hand that he was dealt during the Civil War in Washington, North Carolina. **Isaiah Respass** (1805-1877), a ship-owner, a merchant, a lawyer, and mayor of Washington, was not a man adverse to the pursuit of commercial ventures. The 1862 arrival of the Union Army in Washington presented Respass with opportunities for risky ventures within the Union controlled area and also in the adjacent Confederate controlled area. Respass' pursuit of these opportunities often found him at odds with the government: Union and/or Confederate.

Isaiah Respass had been elected mayor of Washington, North Carolina during 1860. Respass found himself in an unusual position – as the winds of war quickly changed directions. After North Carolina had seceded, he had outfitted his nephews when they joined the Confederate Army. Respass allowed Confederate soldiers to be housed in buildings he owned in the town. When Union soldiers captured Washington during March 1862, Respass and several other town leaders met with the Union commander and supposedly toasted the return of Washington to the Union. What was Respass, a loyal Southerner who supported the Cause or a Unionist sympathizer?

Neither Confederate nor Union government was able to make up its mind about the true beliefs of Mayor Respass. First, the Confederates snatched Respass and sent him to Richmond where he stood trial for treason. After a short imprisonment, some cash payments and much legal wrangling between the Confederate and North Carolina state governments, Respass was freed on direction of Jefferson Davis, but he was told that he could not return to Union occupied territory. Shortly thereafter, Respass, while in residence in Confederate-held Pitt County, was grabbed by a Union raiding party – the charge: treason. Respass caught a break when Edward Stanley, a former North Carolina politician who had known Respass pre-war, returned to North Carolina as Lincoln's military governor. Not only was Respass released, he was named tax collector by Stanley. Controversy soon found Respass yet once more; he ran afoul of Union General Benjamin Franklin Butler after Respass had become involved in some questionable trading

practices between the Confederate and Union lines. It appeared that a fox, Respass, had raided the hen house controlled by an even slier fox, Benjamin Butler. While charges of treason faced Respass, Butler was in a dilemma for Union officers came forward and vouched for the true Union sympathies of the mayor. Respass even signed an oath of allegiance; however, Respass signed as Josiah instead of Isaiah – a small fact that only Butler noticed. Butler was busy with the war in Virginia and he needed to rid himself of the problem represented by the mayor. Butler declared Respass as being crazy and he send the mayor home. Respass was later detained by Union General Edward Potter, but he was released – maybe he was crazy.

How did Respass emerge from the war and his many troubles with the government? He resumed his trading activities much as if nothing had interrupted his normal activities. He filed a claim with the Southern Claims Commission to recover the value of a sawmill destroyed by Union troops during the war. His neighbors elected Respass to serve as their representative in the North Carolina Senate. Isaiah continued his business activities until his death in 1877.

“Isaiah Respass saw neither blue nor gray, he saw green.” With those few words, **Chris Meekins** summed up the subject of his presentation.

(NOTE: Chris warned us that the people of Washington, North Carolina took offense to any reference to that town as “Little” Washington. After all, Washington, NC was the first city named after George Washington).

Editor

******* Comments and Suggestions *******

Comments and suggestions to make the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table and “The Runner” more relevant to your Civil War experience are welcomed. Send them to me at tpwinstead@gmail.com. Please include “CFCWRT News” in your Subject line.

******* Trivia Question for January *******

1 – How is yellow fever spread? The yellow fever virus is spread by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito.

2 – What is the suspected way that yellow fever arrived in Wilmington during the fall of 1862? On August 6, 1862, the blockade-runner *Kate* docked at the port of Wilmington. The *Kate* brought many much needed supplies that would fetch high prices for their owners. The *Kate* also carried a cargo that would exact a much higher price from those who lived in Wilmington during that fall.

Source: *Wilmington Star-News*, August 4, 2012.

3 - Who was the first Wilmington victim of the yellow fever? Lewis Swartzman, a 36-year-old German-born wood-and-coal dealer, died on September 9th. Swartzman’s business was located on the wharf near where the *Kate* docked. His was the first recorded death in the tally that would only abate after cold weather brought Wilmington release from the fever’s grip.

Source: *Wilmington Star-News*, August 4, 2012.

4 - When Isaiah Respass was on trial for treason in Richmond, his son, John R. Respass, was named acting Lieutenant Colonel of what organization? What was the defendant's explanation of his son's actions? John R. Respass had been named acting Lieutenant Colonel of the **1st North Carolina Union Volunteers** – a regiment of loyal Union men. Isaiah Respass stated that his son was a drunk.

5 - After the war, Respass was sued by some business partners involved in a deal gone bad. What was Respass' defense against his partner's claims? Respass was later sued by business partners in a deal gone bad – Respass' defense? He had been declared crazy by Benjamin Butler, and a crazy man was not responsible for debts in North Carolina courts.

Si non e vero, e ben trovato – If it isn't true, at least it's well told.

6 – The three oldest State Archives in United States are in which states? Alabama (1901), Mississippi (1902), and North Carolina (1903).

The State Archives of North Carolina collects, preserves, and makes available for public use historical and evidential materials relating to North Carolina. Its holdings consist of official records of state, county, and local governmental units, and copies of federal and foreign government materials. In addition to these official records are private collections, organization records, maps, pamphlets, sound recordings, photographs, motion picture film, and a small reference library. In all, the Archives houses over 50,000 linear feet of permanently valuable materials containing millions of individual items. Materials in the Archives collections constitute by far the most valuable assembly of manuscript records and North Caroliniana in existence. The State Archives is part of the Division of Archives and Records of the Office of Archives and History and the Department of Cultural Resources.