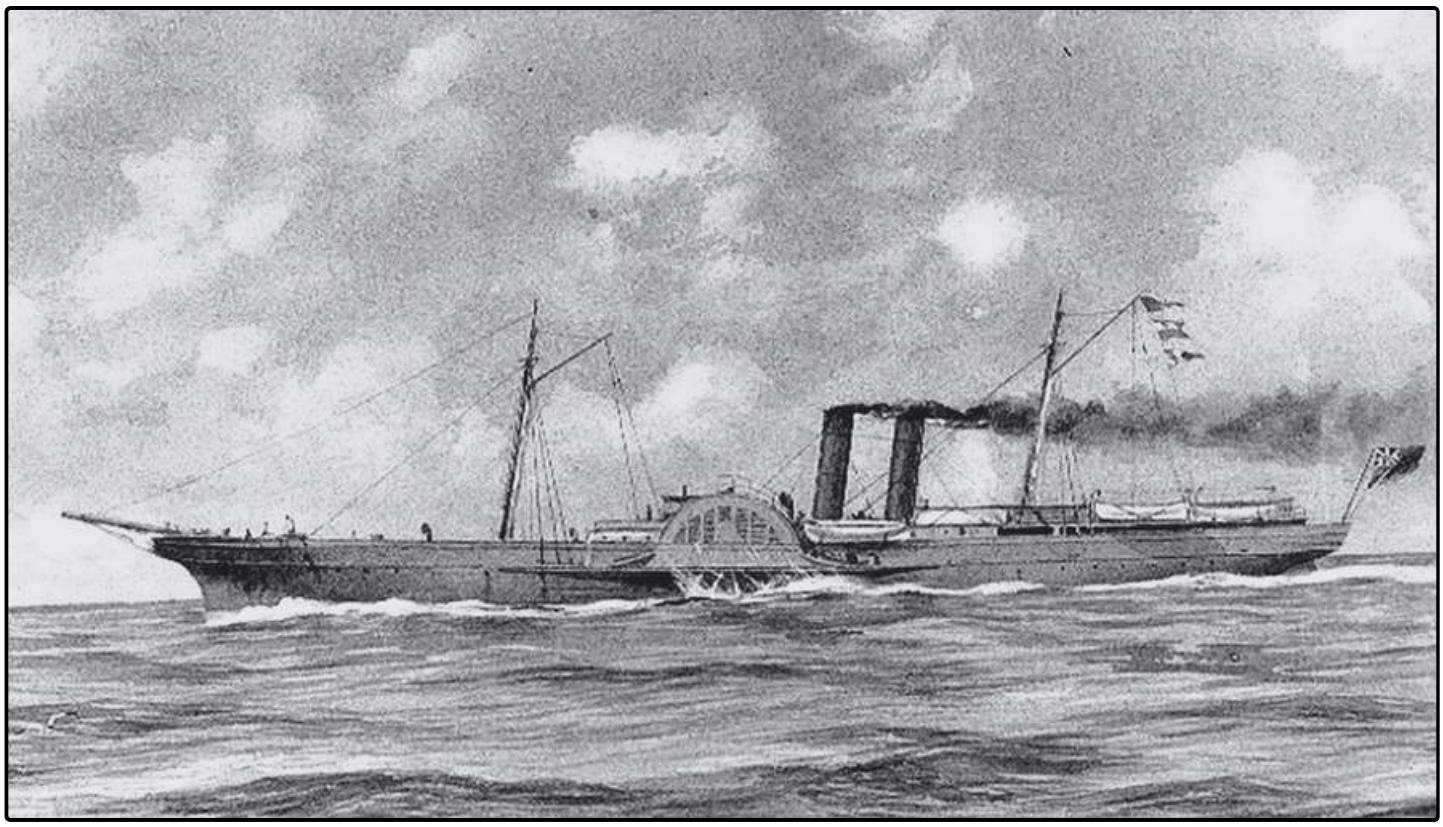
The Runner

The Official Newsletter of the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table



June 2025 | Volume 31 | Number 6

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Letter from the Editor

As the school year ends and graduation caps sail skyward, June offers a fitting time to reflect on the power of learning, past and present. This season of transition reminds us that education has long played a central role in shaping both personal lives and national legacies.

In this issue, we explore a lesser-known chapter of Civil War history: the postwar transformation of the University of North Carolina. The story reveals how the struggle to redefine higher education after Appomattox was just as fierce, and just as vital, as the conflicts fought on the battlefield. The story of UNC between 1865 and 1875 offers important insight into how institutions rebuild, who they serve, and what values they choose to preserve.

Whether you're a lifelong student of the war, or simply reflecting on the season's milestones in your own family, I hope this story reminds you, as it did me, that the Civil War's impact extended far beyond the fighting. It changed how Americans thought, taught, and imagined the future.

As always, thank you for being part of our Round Table.

Matthew Howell
Editor
Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

President's Address

By Dr. Yelena Howell

Dear friends,

A Jewish sage with every reason to be confidently didactic counseled me on the eve of my doctoral graduation. In *Pirket Avos* 2:16 (*The Wisdom of Our Sages*), we turned to universally beneficial advice: "It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it." Accomplishments are occasions to pause and reflect before giving ourselves back over to the flow of things that have no definitive beginning or end.

At the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table, too, our programming, reflection and camaraderie did not begin three decades ago but rather emerged from the national Civil War Round Table movement, in its turn a phenomenon rooted in collective memory of the conflict. How far removed are we from the events and actors of the great drama of 1861-1865? Some would echo Faulkner's sentiment: "the past is not even past." As I kneel at the graves of my children's fourth great-grandparents whose names are routinely spoken in our household, I recall that some of you have personally known people who, as children, had met Col. William Lamb and even sat in the lap of the Confederate commander of Fort Fisher. Distances between us are shorter than one might think.

Thank you for joining us again and again to remember, rediscover and reimagine. Clio is humanity's eternal companion. Our living temple to American history appreciates your patronage and welcomes you this summer and beyond.

Warmest regards,

Yelena

Membership Report

By Kim Berger

Name Tags
Name tags are an amenity that facilitates communication among all attendees. Please be sure to return your badge at the end of each meeting or plan to bring it the next time you join us in person. If you need a new tag, just let me know.

Membership Renewals
Your renewal month is printed on your name tag. Please feel free to check with me in person or by email at CapeFearRT@gmail.com if you have a question about your renewal month. There are several easy ways to "reenlist":

- See membership options and renew online: https://cfcwrt.org/
- Mail a check to CFCWRT, 1008 Heron Run Dr., Leland, NC 28451
- See Ed Lestrange at the next meeting with a check or cash.
- See Yelena Howell for Venmo.

Spread the Word
Remember, we are all ambassadors for the Round Table. Please invite your family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors to join us. We will ensure every guest feels welcome.

Sincerely yours,

Kim Berger
Membership Chair, Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

CFCWRT June Meeting

By Bill Jayne

Angela Zombek On Fort Jefferson in the Civil War:
Union Strategic Base in Remote Dry Tortugas

Our June 12, 2025, meeting of the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table features a presentation by club favorite Dr. Angela Zombek, Ph.D., associate professor of history at UNCW. Dr. Zombek, an expert on the prisoner of war experience in the Civil War, will talk about the strategic Union outpost of Fort Jefferson, the largest brick masonry structure in the Western Hemisphere, located on the remote island of Garden Key in the Dry Tortugas, 70 miles west of Key West.

Dry Tortugas, lower left on map. Source: SW Maps.com

Fort Jefferson on Garden Key in the Dry Tortugas. Source: drytortugas.com

Fort Jefferson, posted far out on the western entrance to the Florida Straits, is closer to Cuba than to the mainland of Florida. The fort encloses about 16 acres and was constructed with 16 million bricks. The site was recommended for military use by U.S. Army engineer Captain Robert E. Lee in the early 1840s. Construction began in 1846 under the direction of another U.S. Army engineer captain, Horatio Wright, who would rise to the role of commander of the VI Corps of the Army of the Potomac in 1864-65. Fort Jefferson was constructed as part of the Third System of Defense, which aimed to reduce the need for a standing army, protect American commerce, and defend the nation from foreign adversaries. No one anticipated that, come the 1860s, Ft. Jefferson would also be used to suppress a domestic rebellion.

CFCWRT June Meeting Cont.

Professor Zombek's talk will examine the experiences of Union soldiers assigned to garrison duty at Ft. Jefferson during the Civil War, and give an overview of the fort's wartime purposes, which ranged from defending the Florida Straits, to serving as a coaling station for naval vessels, to imprisoning Confederate POWs and Union soldiers who violated army rules and regulations while in the ranks.

The strategic location of Ft. Jefferson in the Florida Straits. Source: American Battlefield Trust.

Today, Fort Jefferson is the keystone of the remote and very beautiful Dry Tortugas National Park. The park can be reached by seaplane or a pleasant boat ride from Key West. With outstanding coral reefs, and marine life it is a premier snorkeling destination. Camping is also available in the park. Yet, it was much different in the 1860s, and, indeed, after the war the fort fell into disuse. It was plagued by a lack of fresh water and susceptibility to diseases like yellow fever.

Fort Jefferson National Monument was designated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt under the Antiquities Act in 1935. The monument was expanded in 1983 and re-designated as Dry Tortugas National Park on October 26, 1992 by an act of Congress.

Dry Tortugas was established to protect the island and marine ecosystems of the Dry Tortugas, to preserve Fort Jefferson and submerged cultural resources such as shipwrecks, and to allow for public access.

CFCWRT June Meeting Cont.

Dr. Zombek (Ph.D. University of Florida) is an historian of the Civil War Era and is Associate Professor of History at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She is also coordinator of the Masters Program in History at UNCW and the managing editor of "Interpreting the Civil War" series at Kent State University. She is the author of *Penitentiaries, Punishment, and Military Prisons: Familiar Responses to an Extraordinary Crisis during the America Civil War* (Kent State University Press). Her current book project, *Stronghold of the Union: Key West Under Martial Law,* is under contract with The University Press of Florida.

Dr. Angela Zombek

The Sachsman Symposium on the 19th Century Press recently announced that Professor Zombek was named to deliver the signature Hazel Dicken-Garcia address at Augusta University in November 2025. Augusta University is located in Augusta, Georgia.

She is a native of Ohio and holds an MA from the University of Akron and a Ph.D. from the University of Florida. She recalls a visit to the Camp Chase historic site in Columbus, Ohio, as the spark that ignited her interest in Civil War history, especially the history of incarceration in the war. Camp Chase became a prison for captured Confederates and many died there. More than 400,000 soldiers—about 194,000 Union and 214,000 Confederate—were captured over the course of the war. Prison conditions were brutal with approximately 30,000 Union soldiers and 26,000 Confederates dying while imprisoned. Deaths occurred most often because of medical conditions including infectious diseases such as typhoid fever, cholera, yellow fever, malaria, etc. Many also died because of malnutrition and exposure to the elements.

Make plans to come and hear this fascinating story about a little known aspect of the Civil War. The meeting will take place on Thursday evening, June 12, beginning at 7 p.m. Doors open at 6:30. As usual, the meeting will be held in Elebash Hall at the rear of St. John's Episcopal Church at 1219 Forest Hills Drive in Wilmington.

The church parking lot and entrance to the meeting room is easily accessed via Park Avenue off of Independence Boulevard. Bring a friend! For more information about membership in the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table, go to http://www.cfcwrt.org and pick "Join/Rejoin." See you there!

A New Season of Learning: Reflections on Education and the Civil War's Intellectual Legacy

By Matthew Howell

As the school year winds down and families celebrate the achievements of graduates, I have found myself thinking deeply about education: its promise, its cost, and the legacies we carry into every classroom. This May, I beamed with pride as my wife completed her doctorate. Watching her, I am reminded that learning never ends. As I work toward my own Master's in American History, I am especially attuned to how the past has shaped our educational present.

While conducting research for a summer seminar in North Carolina history, I encountered an interesting article by historian Robin Brabham titled "Defining the American University: The University of North Carolina, 1865–1875." Published in the *North Carolina Historical Review* (1980), it examines a side of the Civil War era rarely discussed outside academia: how war and Reconstruction reshaped American higher education, particularly in the South.

For those of us who tend to dwell on troop movements, battlefield tactics, and command decisions, Brabham's work offers a valuable detour. It reminds us that the Civil War's impact extended well beyond the battlefield. It disrupted, then reimagined, institutions meant to shape minds and mold citizens. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the first public university in the nation, serves as his case study in postwar educational transformation. Brabham tells a story not of muskets or generals, but of classrooms, board meetings, and curriculum reform. Of how the Civil War reshaped the University of North Carolina and, in doing so, helped define what higher education in the United States would become.

A New Season of Learning Cont.

David L. Swain

The Ruins of Chapel Hill

In 1865, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill stood not in flames, but in ruin nonetheless. Although it was spared the physical destruction that befell many Southern towns, the institution was bankrupt, its campus deserted, and its moral authority in question. Enrollment had collapsed during the war. Many students and faculty joined the Confederate cause. The university's antebellum leadership, chiefly President David L. Swain, had tethered the school's identity to the Old South's social and political order. Now that order was gone. Swain, a former North Carolina governor and longtime president of the university, initially hoped to restore UNC as it had been. He lobbied the new state government for funds, preserved institutional records, and invited former students back. But the world was changing around him.

What Should a University Be?

Brabham chronicles the decade-long battle over what kind of institution UNC should become in the postwar South. Was it to remain a classical college steeped in Latin, Greek, and moral philosophy, reserved for the sons of privilege? Or should it transform into a modern university, one rooted in scientific advancement, professional training, and accessibility?

This was no idle question. Nationally, American higher education was undergoing a revolution. The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 had created a new model: publicly funded universities that would serve the "industrial classes," teaching agriculture, mechanical arts, and practical sciences. Institutions like Cornell and the newly established Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) embodied this vision. Could UNC follow suit?

Swain and his traditionalist allies resisted. They favored the old liberal arts model, believing it shaped moral leaders. But younger faculty and reformers, including Professor Andrew D. Hepburn, argued that UNC's future depended on embracing reform. Hepburn denounced the archaic curriculum and called for the introduction of electives, more rigorous admission standards, and the inclusion of modern subjects like chemistry and engineering. He wanted UNC to compete on the national stage.

A New Season of Learning Cont.

A Vision Interrupted

Kemp P. Battle

The tipping point came in 1867, when a committee led by trustee and future president Kemp P. Battle proposed sweeping reforms. Their plan called for dividing the university into distinct schools, offering electives, emphasizing scientific and technical education, and raising the bar for graduation. Brabham details this moment as UNC's first real attempt to become a "modern university." But politics got in the way.

Reconstruction brought about a radical shift in North Carolina's state government. With power in the hands of Republicans and African American voters for the first time, a new university administration was installed, one that opposed Swain and fired many faculty members, including reformers.

The university briefly reopened in 1869 under new leadership, but lacked direction, funding, and students. By 1871, it closed entirely. It would not reopen until 1875, this time with the reforms of the 1860s largely abandoned. The moment had passed, but the ideas had not.

Legacy Beyond the Lost Cause

Brabham's article doesn't paint the UNC reform movement as an unqualified success. The plans of Battle and Hepburn were visionary but unrealized. Still, they mattered. They planted seeds. In the decades that followed, UNC would gradually adopt many of the reforms first proposed during Reconstruction—electives, scientific instruction, professional training—until it evolved into the public research university we know today.

Why should Civil War enthusiasts care?

Because this story reminds us that the war's legacy was not limited to what happened between 1861 and 1865. It extended into the reconstruction of every major American institution, including education. The University of North Carolina became a battleground not of soldiers, but of ideas. And as Brabham shows, the conflict over curriculum, access, and the meaning of a university was no less fierce than the one waged at Gettysburg.

A New Season of Learning Cont.

A Personal Postscript

As students across the country toss their caps in the air this May and June, and as I watch my own family reach new academic heights, I cannot help but see a thread that connects us back to those classrooms of the 1860s. Our institutions were shaped not only by war, but by the determination to grow from it.

Brabham's article is a timely reminder that the Civil War's impact reverberated far beyond battlefields and statehouses. It reached into the heart of American institutions, where the work of reconstruction was not only political but intellectual. In the uneasy years after Appomattox, the University of North Carolina became a site of struggle over what knowledge should be preserved, what new paths should be blazed, and who ought to be invited into the halls of learning. These debates, once held in faculty meetings and trustee reports, still echo today as universities across the nation grapple with their public missions, their historical legacies, and the fragile balance between tradition and transformation in a time of abundant noise and uncertainty...all with needs of an ever-changing world in mind.

As we celebrate a season of endings and new beginnings, Brabham invites us to see the classroom as one of the great frontiers of Reconstruction. What happened in Chapel Hill between 1865 and 1875 was not just the story of a Southern university reinventing itself, it was part of the broader American story of reckoning, rebuilding, and reimagining what freedom, citizenship, and opportunity could mean in the aftermath of war. If we are to fully understand the Civil War's legacy, we must consider not only who won the war, but how the nation chose to educate the generations who came after.

Matthew Howell is the editor of the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table newsletter and an aspiring historian from Wilmington, North Carolina. He holds a bachelor's degree in history from Fayetteville State University and is currently pursuing a master's degree in American history at East Carolina University. His research centers on North Carolina history, with particular focus on Indigenous communities, the Civil War, and the natural and cultural history of Southern Appalachia. He also serves as Director of Operations at the Queensboro Shirt Company. He is a proud husband and father.

Notable Events in the Cape Fear Region

Friday, June 6, 3-4 pm. NHC Public Library, Oak Room at Northeast Branch, 1241 Military Cutoff Rd., Wilmington. **Past Tense: Historical Fiction Book Club.** Info: https://libcal.nhcgov.com/event/12795760

Friday, June 6, 9-10 pm, Burgwin-Wright House, 224 Market St., Wilmington. **Candlelit Night Tour of the museum.** Tickets $20 (+tax). Please call (910) 762-0570 to reserve your spot.

Saturday, June 7 or **Saturday, June 21, 8:30-10 pm. Latimer House Night Tour** featuring a scholarly discussion of gaslight. 126 S. 3rd St., Wilmington; $22: https://latimerhouse.org/tours/#night

Wednesday, June 11, doors open at 6 pm. Summer jazz at the **Bellamy Mansion Museum.** Info on this series and other notable happenings at the Bellamy: https://www.bellamymansion.org/calendar-of-events.html

Saturday, June 14, 10 am-12 pm. Dr. Chris E. Fonvielle Jr. will lead a Civil War Wilmington walking tour for **Wilmington True History Tours**. Tickets are $25 for adults or $22 for Veterans and First Responders: https://www.wilmingtontruehistory.com/our-experiences-1/

Tuesday, June 17, 11 am-12 pm. Juneteenth Committee of Wilmington will host a tribute to **United States Colored Troops at the Wilmington National Cemetery.** Info and calendar of other area Juneteenth 2025 events: https://tinyurl.com/Jnteenth2025

Tuesday, June 17, doors open at 6:30 pm, presentation at 7. Burgwin-Wright House, 224 Market St., Wilmington. **Cape Fear Revolutionary War Round Table's** summer meeting featuring award-winning novelist **Suzanne Adair** with **"Into the Lion's Den": William Hooper's Harrowing Mission to Crown-Occupied Wilmington".** Visitor fee $5 at the door. Save room for a bite of Mrs. Nancy Fonvielle's nonpareil chocolate fudge. Info: https://tinyurl.com/CFRWRTJune

Saturday, June 21, 10 am-4 pm. "A Terrible Storm of Iron and Lead": A Summer Artillery Program at Fort Fisher. Guest speaker at 1 pm: Col. **Wade Sokolosky** with *North Carolina's Confederate Hospitals, 1864-1865.* Info: https://tinyurl.com/IronLead

Sunday, June 22, 10-11:30 am. **Wilmington Water Tours** presents **Dr. Chris E. Fonvielle Jr.** with **"The Clarion Call of Liberty and Independence"**. Info and more of Chris's upcoming programs: https://www.chrisfonvielle.com/events

Numerous events throughout the month of June at the **Cameron Art Museum:** https://cameronartmuseum.org/events/

A Look Back at the Battle of Hatteras Inlet Batteries (& Why We Should Discuss the Naval War More Often)

By Roman Berger

As regular readers of my newsletter musings might ascertain, I am not native to the Carolinas. Since relocating here in the middle of 2023, however, I have sought to learn a little bit more about the state I have called my home. I have tried to learn a little more about the region's history, particularly when it comes to the Civil War. This desire to research about the past and present led me to discover an interesting little facet. I've written before about how Fort Fisher's fall all but secured Union victory in the overall conflict.

However, the first major battle involving the State of North Carolina was also a naval conflict - the Battle of Hatteras Inlet Batteries from August 28th-29th, 1861. And looking up that battle has led me to suspect that the naval aspect of the Civil War feels overlooked in the general public's knowledge of the conflict.

It's a personal suspicion and a bit of a generalization, of course. Most students have (hopefully) seen the famed Scott's Great Snake cartoon in their history classes regarding the Anaconda Plan. The phrase "damn the torpedoes" stems from Admiral Farragut's command at the Battle of Mobile Bay. There might be some knowledge of Burnside's Expedition, as well. Yet, ask the general public, and it feels like the naval blockades take a backseat to the land effort and strategies of the two Armies; the naval war is seldom discussed.

It's an understandable oversight. After all, the vast majority of casualties were in land battles. These battles were influential - Gettysburg, Antietam, Vicksburg, Bull Run. These and more influenced the development of the nation as well as the future of military strategies. There is so much to explore and analyze with the armies of Grant, Lee, Longstreet, McClellan, Jackson, etc.

Yet, the naval aspect of the Civil War should not be ignored. Especially since the Anaconda Plan was imposed after Fort Sumter fell. The logic was simple; block the Confederate forces from gaining supplies from any foreign nation that would recognize or otherwise support them. It was the first overarching strategy of the conflict. This proved to be pivotal early in the war. The Battle of Hatteras Inlet Batteries stemmed from the Anaconda Plan, serving as an attempt from Union Major General Benjamin Butler to "capture an important haven for blockade runners", as per the National Park Service. It was a bid to confront forts built by the Confederacy specifically to facilitate blockade runners, with control over Pamlico Sound at stake.

A Look Back at the Battle of Hatteras Inlet Batteries (& Why We Should Discuss the Naval War More Often) Cont.

It was the first major test of the Union Blockade's fortitude, as well as the first battle to directly involve the crucial economic state of North Carolina. After all, North Carolina was not just an agrarian state producing cash crops for export, it was also an ocean-bound state with ports relatively close to Raleigh and the Confederate capital of Richmond. Stopping ships from entering Hatteras Inlet would help compromise the economic activity of the Confederacy, and thus their ability to maintain a sustained war effort.

Silas Stringham and Benjamin Butler were sent to execute the plan, leading the Blockading Squadron and the 9th and 20th New York Infantries. The battle was relatively short and rather one-sided. Union forces were able to attack Fort Clark from well out at sea. Despite efforts from Samuel Barton, the Confederate firepower was no match. The next morning, Fort Hatteras was attacked and would fall by the end of the day. The Union secured the Hatteras Inlet with only one fatality, compared to four Confederate deaths and 691 captured soldiers.

This was the first Union victory in the war, and it was a rather notable triumph. After the disastrous Battle of Bull Run earlier that summer, victory here repaired Union morale to some extent. It was even larger strategically, though. The victory on the Outer Banks was arguably as pivotal to influencing the war as the defense of Gettysburg would be two years later. After all, any military force needed to be supplied with adequate munitions and other supplies. And the Agrarian South was not producing nearly enough firepower on its own; the Confederate war machine was far from the Union's capabilities. They would have had to go from the outside; the Union, trying to put the rebellion under control, found ways to make it as hard as possible. By taking the forts, the Union was able to narrow the Confederacy's possible ports of entry.

Without the ability to trade easily, Confederate successes were restricted. The limited nature of the Confederate Navy, also caused by the region's lesser industrial strength, did the South no favors. Not only did they prevent new material from going in, they also prevented the export of cotton, the king crop of the region. With a curtailed ability to obtain supplies, export cotton, and break the blockades, the disadvantages were clear from the start. By 1864, the Confederate economy was in freefall.

A Look Back at the Battle of Hatteras Inlet Batteries (& Why We Should Discuss the Naval War More Often) Cont.

Of course, the rationale for why this particular battle is often overlooked is obvious, and these reasons can be applied to other naval battles in the Civil War, albeit to a lesser extent. The sheer death toll at other battles - including the earlier Battle of Bull Run - is more sobering, an underscoring of the tragic nature of war. Even in victory, the human cost is profound. Beyond that, the war went on for four years, with the war, strategies, and philosophies shifting in ways far beyond merely securing the perimeter. Lastly, the drama at Hatteras Inlet was quieter, the battle only lasting two days, and the conflicts over the next four years would make what happened at Hatteras Inlet look relatively minor.

But any less consequential?

In retrospect, the outcome at Hatteras Inlet would foreshadow the outcome of the Civil War, even if it didn't serve as a definitive "turning point" akin to Gettysburg. The Union effectively starved the South out of any chance of victory by striking at the Confederacy's economic productivity and outreach efforts via an effective naval blockade, and that was before the Emancipation Proclamation. Simply put, the Battle of Hatteras Inlet Batteries symbolized the gulf in resources between the sides as well as demonstrating how relatively small blows can prove consequential later on.

And it speaks to why it might be wise for lessons on the Civil War to include more than a cursory mention of the naval war efforts. Successful military campaigns require both short-term and long-term efforts, and the Union, though not executing a perfect campaign by any means, was able to capitalize well enough to secure the advantage at the end of the conflict. All of that can be traced back to one simple battle on the Outer Banks.

Roman Berger is the Audio-Visual Coordinator at the Cape Fear Civil War Roundtable, and is a member of the organization's executive committee. A lifelong American History buff, he possesses a Bachelor of Arts in History from Stony Brook University.

TRIP TO VICKSBURG WITH CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Last year the Cleveland Civil War Round Table invited members of our round table to participate in their annual battlefield tour and trip. The destination was Gettysburg and the experience was top-notch in every way. Five members of our round table plus two guests went to Gettysburg in September and reveled in a two-day guided tour of the battlefield plus a moving and enlightening tour of the Spangler Farm field hospital site.

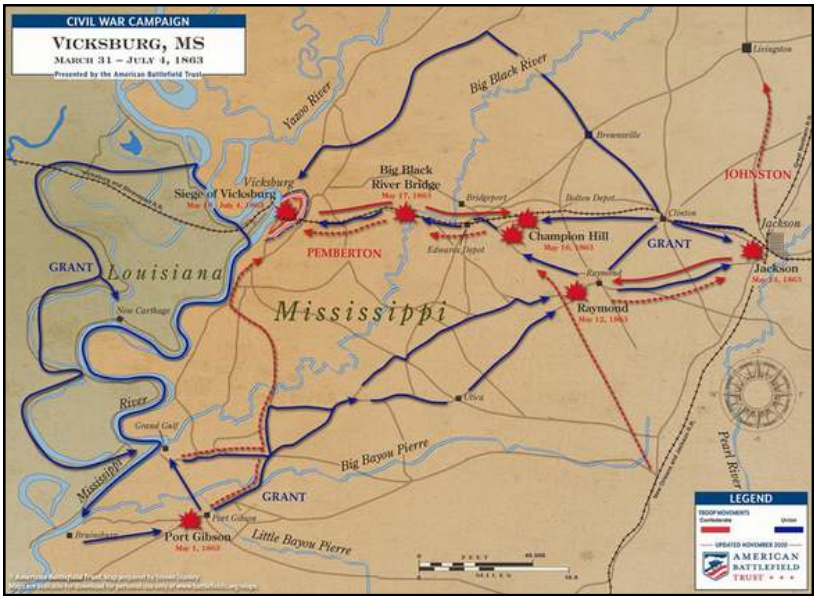
This year, our friends in Cleveland have invited us to participate in a tour of the Vicksburg Campaign from Bruinsburg to Vicksburg on 25-28 September, 2025. The trip includes expert guidance provided by Capt. Rick Martin, USAF (Ret.) who is also a retired Chief Ranger for Vicksburg National Military Park. On Friday, September 26, the tour will focus on Grant's movement across the Mississippi and the battles leading up to his investment of the fortress city of Vicksburg from the east. The next day will focus on the Union assaults and siege operations leading up to the capitulation of the Confederate command on July 4, 1863.

The cost of the trip is $175 which will cover the cost of the guide, any entrance fees and boxed lunches each day. Rooms have been reserved at the Courtyard by Marriott Vicksburg and breakfast is included in the room rate. The cost of the room and the cost of transportation to and from Vicksburg is at your own expense, as will be the cost of dinners.

Full details are available at:
https://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Field-Trip-2025-movement-order.pdf

Feel free to contact Bill Jayne at jayne.bill@gmail.com or (910) 386-9203 if you have questions.

We were lucky to hear Terry Winschel's excellent presentation on Vicksburg in February and this is a great opportunity to actually see the ground and learn more about this most pivotal campaign.



Members Forum Double Header
Information Packed & Moving

By William J. Worth

The May 8, 2025, meeting of the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table featured two presentations by distinguished members of the club. Christina Grazer is a guide at the Bellamy Mansion whose tours are in great demand. MaryBeth Allison recently earned her Ph.D. in History and is working on a book based on her dissertation.

A native Texan, Christina moved to Wilmington several years ago and quickly became enamored with the local history. The first time she drove past the Bellamy Mansion, the magnificent antebellum house at 5th and Market, she fell in love with it and for the past seven years has served as a Premium Tour Guide.

MaryBeth focused on Civil War history for her Ph.D. at Liberty University and had the chance to work with Dr. Chris Fonvielle, Professor Emeritus at UNCW, and Dr. Angela Zombek, Associate Professor of History at UNCW. Her experiences in Wilmington led her to join our round table although she and her family now reside in Beaufort, S.C.

Christina's dramatic presentation told the story of William Benjamin Gould, an enslaved artisan who worked on the Bellamy Mansion, and made a daring escape along with seven other enslaved men on September 21, 1862, in the midst of the Yellow Fever epidemic that ravaged Wilmington at the time. Perhaps as many as 1,000 people died in the epidemic, around 10 percent of the total population of the city.

Christina told her audience that she wanted to bring them back to that date, a rainy, humid night when the epidemic had forced most Wilmingtonians indoors or away from the city. Slave patrols designed to enforce a curfew and thwart escape attempts, were slack on the stormy night full of anxiety over the epidemic.

Gould was enslaved by prosperous plantation owner Nicholas Nixon who was the leading producer of peanuts in the United States at the time.

Members Forum Double Header
Information Packed & Moving Cont.

William B. Gould and his six sons. All served in WWI except William B. Gould, Jr., who served in the Spanish-American War. Source was National Park Service, which credited William B. Gould IV.

Nixon owned a house on Chestnut Street between 3rd and 4th, "where the Thalian Hall parking lot is located today," Christina told us. Gould and his seven cohorts lived in the house and went to work at various locations in the city.

Owners such as Nixon received pay for the work performed by the men. The men had been planning the escape for some time and moved quickly. They rowed 28 nautical miles down the Cape Fear River and in the morning were picked up the *USS Cambridge*, a gunboat on blockade duty. Two other boatloads of escapees also made it to the fleet that night but it's not clear whether they were enlisted into the Navy like the eight picked up by the *Cambridge*.

Gould served on the *Cambridge* and other ships, including the *USS Niagara*, a large steam-powered frigate that brought him to European waters in search of Confederate commerce raiders. He kept a diary of his service, the only known diary of a formerly enslaved sailor who served in the U.S. Navy during the Civil War.

He was discharged in late 1865 and married Cornelia Reed, a woman from Wilmington who had been dramatically saved from slavery by a fund-raising drive and brought to Massachusetts in 1858. Gould had met Cornelia prior to her exodus from North Carolina and corresponded with her extensively during the war.

The Goulds lived in Dedham, Massachusetts, raising a family of two daughters and six sons. Gould became a successful businessman plying his trade of plasterer and mason and becoming active in the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the leading association of Union veterans. He served as commander of his local post in 1892.

Gould's sons served in the U.S. military and his descendants became distinguished in many fields. Notably, his great grandson, William B. Gould IV became a law professor at Stanford University and head of the National Labor Relations Board.

Members Forum Double Header
Information Packed & Moving Cont.

Gould's diary had been gathering dust in the attic of a descendant in Massachusetts since 1923 but by 1998, William B. Gould IV received a call from Jonathan Noffke, curator at the Bellamy Mansion that let him know that plaster work with the engraved initials of "WBG" had been uncovered at the mansion. That spurred Gould IV to get to work on turning his great grandfather's diary into a book. Gould IV made several trips to Wilmington, conferring with local historians including Dr. Chris E. Fonvielle Jr., and in 2002 published *Diary of a Contraband*.

The stirring life story of William B. Gould is capped by a 2023 ceremony naming a park in Dedham in his honor and the unveiling of an impressive statue of Gould, a fitting monument to an extraordinary life.

Dr. MaryBeth Allison continued our very successful Members Forum program with a presentation titled "Social Distortion in Prison Life: Life on the Inside for Civil War Prisoners of War." MaryBeth began by noting that more than 400,000 Civil War soldiers—North and South—became prisoners and that some 56,000 died in captivity. Neither side in the war was prepared for the huge numbers of prisoners and most of the deaths were due to illness, especially contagious diseases.

MaryBeth pointed out, however, that most prisoners survived their harrowing experiences and "lived beyond the suffering and sickness and vowed with steadfast determination to stay busy, maintain their sanity, and counter the social distortion of prison life."

Members Forum Double Header
Information Packed & Moving Cont.

She gave moving examples of the importance of religious faith and the efforts men went to in order to keep faith alive and observe religious ceremonies. Sports, crafts, and service—such as working in prison hospitals—also played an important role.

Over and over, she said, prisoners wrote of the importance of friendship, of having "tour guides" who could watch over their comrades and advise them of the best methods of coping with the terrible challenges of prison life. She recounted one story of a friend who seeing a buddy slipping into lethargy and indifference, punched him in order to bring him around.

Idleness, MaryBeth found, was the worst enemy of prison survival. Letters were a great morale booster to prisoners, as they were to all soldiers and sailors, but Dr. Allison found that letters were a double-edged sword. Bad news from home or a lack of correspondence could drive prisoners deeper into depression and suffocate their will to survive.

Both MaryBeth and Christina graciously answered questions and contributed greatly to the enjoyment of all in attendance.

Dr. MaryBeth Allison pictured above.

To the right, CFCWRT President, Yelena Howell, opens the meeting with the Pledge of Alegiance

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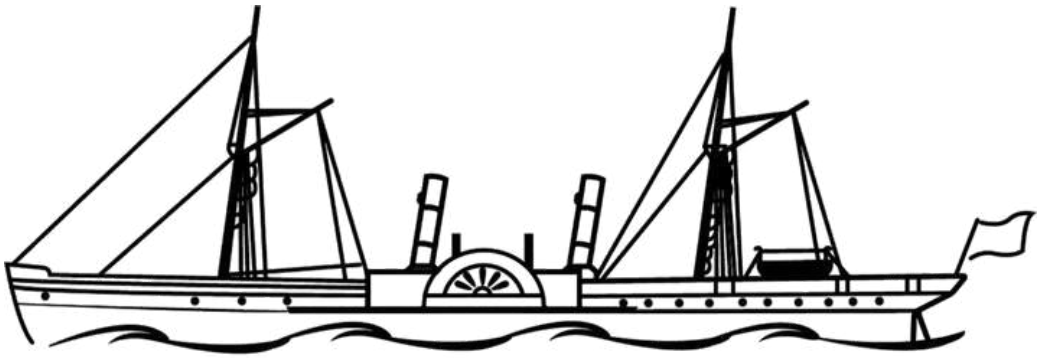

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Join us at our monthly meetings featuring acclaimed authors, esteemed professors, and passionate historians from sites like Fort Fisher.

Held at **St. John's Episcopal Church, 1219 Forest Hills Drive, Wilmington, NC**, these events are a chance to explore fascinating Civil War topics and connect with fellow enthusiasts.
Doors open at 6:30pm and the meetings start at 7pm.

6/12/25 - Dr. Angela Zombek
"Civil War History of Fort Jefferson Florida"

7/10/25 - Civil War Fair

8/14/25 - Fred Claridge
"Civil War Historians"

9/11/25 - Dr. Robert M. Browning Jr.
"*I Am Fighting for the Union: the Civil War Letters of Naval Officer Henry Willis Wells*"

10/9/25 - Clint Johnson
"A Vast & Fiendish Plot: The Confederate Attack on New York City"

11/13/25 - Sarah Kay Bierle
"John Pelham: Trained at West Point but Aiming Artillery for the Confederacy"

12/11/25 - Brad Gottfried
"The Best & Worst Generals at Gettysburg"

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