

CAPE FEAR CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table (CFCWRT) was established in 1994 and our first president was George Slaton who led the organization until the year 2000.

George, who now lives in the Davidson, NC, area, recalls that an organization called the Civil War Round Table Associates met in Wilmington in the summer of 1993. The organization was founded and led by legendary battlefield preservationist and Civil War activist, Jerry Russell, and their primary purpose was to encourage Civil War Round Tables to get involved in battlefield preservation.

The keynote speaker was the incomparable Ed Bearss, and the event included a workshop on “How to Start a Civil War Round Table.” That workshop motivated George and others to establish a round table in Wilmington. Contributing to the momentum was Civil War publisher Ted Savas and prospective authors Chris Fonvielle and Mark Bradley. Ted, then leading the publishing company of Savas Woodbury, first published Chris Fonvielle’s *The Wilmington Campaign: Last Rays of Departing Hope*, and Mark Bradley’s *The Battle of Bentonville: Last Stand in the Carolinas*. George noted “It was a momentous weekend!”

It took some time to get rolling and the Cape Fear Civil War Round Table first met at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington (UNCW) in October 1994. The first speaker was Chris Fonvielle, who later joined the faculty of UNCW. Professor Fonvielle, now retired, is the premier historian of the Lower Cape Fear from Colonial times through the Civil War. Following George Slaton, Professor Fonvielle led the CFCWRT from 2000 through 2006. The meeting site changed from UNCW to St. John’s Episcopal Church and then to St. Andrew’s on the Sound Episcopal Church. Under the leadership of David Norris (2006-10) and Bob Cooke (2010 to 2018), the organization grew steadily and many nationally known speakers and authors spoke to the group as well as accomplished local historians.

From 1997 through 2005 the organization featured tours to locations such as Richmond and its vicinity, Sharpsburg, Md., and Spotsylvania County, Va. From 2006 through 2011 tours were shortened to locations in North Carolina that could be reached within a day rather than requiring overnight travel. Today, the round table features opportunities focused on local attractions such as the Wilmington Railroad Museum, a great attraction that preserves the history of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, the lifeline that connected the south's last blockade running port with the Army of Northern Virginia. Dr. Fonvielle has led many tours for the round table including a hike through the maritime forest to discover the earthworks of the "Sugar Loaf Line," a boat tour on the Cape Fear River and an evening tour of Ft. Fisher that ended well after dark looking out on the ocean as "friendly enemies," heroes of the 1865 battle, Col. William Lamb, CSA, and Brigadier General Newton Martin Curtis, USA, did in 1893.

The CFCWRT is actively involved in supporting Fort Fisher and Fort Anderson, the NC Historical Sites in the area, the J. Ryder Lewis historical park in Carolina Beach, as well as the NC Maritime Museum in Southport. We have also featured speakers from the Latimer House, the museum of the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, in Wilmington.

Beginning in 2018, the round table moved to Harbor Church in Wilmington and then back to St. John's Episcopal Church in midtown Wilmington. Bill Jayne has been president of the club since 2018 and has seen it through the devastating Hurricane Florence in 2018 and the COVID phenomenon. As of 2024, the round table has more members than it did in 2018.

We now present a summer program featuring "member forums". in which members present short programs (approximately 15 minutes) on specific topics of their choosing. We have also offered seminar-style round table discussions on specific topics such as the failure of Confederate forces to attack the Union landing force before its assault on Fort Fisher.

On May 9, 2024, at a regularly scheduled meeting of the round table, the members unanimously approved a set of bylaws drafted by an ad-hoc committee. These bylaws, the first in the 30-year history of

the club, set out the process for electing an executive committee comprising five officers, five at-large executive committee members and the immediate past-president as an ex-officio member.

On September 12, 2024, at a regularly scheduled meeting, the members elected its first executive committee. Yelena Bulatova Howell was elected as president.

On October 10, 2024, more than 50 members and guests attended a dinner meeting celebrating the 30th anniversary of the founding of the round table. Present were past presidents Dr. Chris Fonvielle, David Norris, Bob Cooke, Bill Jayne. Current president Yelena Howell presided.

Bill Jayne
Immediate Past President, Cape Fear Civil War Round Table