

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

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Chicago, Illinois

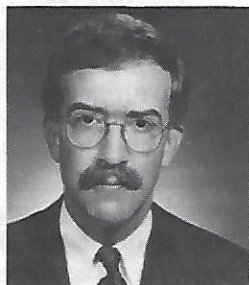
April, 1987

Michael B. Chesson on The Richmond Bread Riot

by C. Robert Douglas

On March 31, 1863, Colonel T. Bassett French, military aide to Virginia Governor John Letcher, wrote to a friend in western Virginia to request a supply of wheat which, he said, could not be obtained in Richmond and added... "We are on the eve of starvation and unless the ways are opened up very shortly, we will all be laid low..."

The Richmond bread riot of April, 1863 is the largest and most famous of a series of food disturbances that occurred in the Confederacy in the spring of 1863. Ironically, it is one of the least understood features of life on the Southern home front. On April 17, 1987, Michael B. Chesson, associate professor of history at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, will address The Round Table on this relatively unknown area of life in the Confederate nation. In Mr. Chesson's view, the event has been dismissed as unimportant by most historians because it allegedly involved only a handful of hysterical women. When mentioned at all, it is often misdated and the military accounts usually omit reference to it altogether. Yet hundreds of women and men participated in what was not a spontaneous wave of looting, but rather a carefully planned protest against the Davis government and grievances over food shortages and inflation. The riot threatened the rebel capital and affected troop movements of the Army of Northern Virginia.



Michael B. Chesson

Circumstances were ripe for an event such as the bread riot. Inflation had plagued the Confederate nation since the outset of the war and had reached an alarming state by 1863, particularly in the cities. In January, a Richmond newspaper had printed a schedule which illustrated that the weekly cost to feed a small family had risen from \$6.55 in 1860 to \$68.25 in 1863. Unfortunately, workers' wages hadn't kept pace. By March, flour was selling for \$100 a barrel; beef, \$2 a pound; apples, \$25 a bushel; coarse cotton, \$2.25 a yard; molasses, \$30 a gallon; boots, \$50 a pair; and wood, \$30 a cord.

Due to the excessive amount of Confederate currency in circulation, any shortage of goods was enough to send prices soaring. Widespread shortages did exist, due to the increasingly effective blockade as well as to an inefficient supply network which failed frequently to bring in available products. Particularly significant to Richmond was the fact that in securing food and other essentials, the city was in



460th Regular Meeting

Mike Chesson
on
The Richmond Bread Riot

Friday, April 17, 1987

Note: This is the third Friday of the month

Quality Inn
Halsted and Madison
Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.
\$13.00 per person
Entree: Veal Scaloppini, Fish, or Fruit Plate



Meeting date

Because of a conflict in the speaker's schedule, the April meeting has been moved to the third Friday of the month, April 17. We will return to our regular meeting night, the second Friday of the month, in May.

direct competition with the Commissary Department's efforts to procure goods for Lee's army. The government's method of impressment was denounced on all sides, as the practice of paying a 'market value' for goods failed to account for the severity of current inflation. In March, the price schedule of the War Department reflected about 50 per cent of actual market value.

The situation in Richmond became critical in late March, 1863. Earlier that month there had been a near panic in the city when the government ordered the seizure of all flour in the mills and warehouses; this problem had not been resolved by the end of the month as the War Department ignored a Richmond court's order to stop this impressment. In addition, the long winter was delaying crops. On March 19 and 20 the city had a nine-inch snowfall, the heaviest of the winter. Although this late snow

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THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



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18 East Chestnut Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611
Phone: (312) 944-3085

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The only requirement for membership in The Round Table is a genuine interest in the Civil War and its era. For information, address Dan Weinberg, 18 E. Chestnut St., Chicago, IL 60611.



About 160 descendants of crewmen of the Monitor and the Merrimac attended the 125th anniversary commemoration of the battle between the two ships held in early March in Portsmouth, Virginia. They were located by historian-archivist Irwin Berent who has spent about nine years looking. So far he has found 300 of an estimated 10,000. He particularly wants to find descendants of William Durst of Philadelphia, the only Jew on the Monitor, and Siah Carter of Virginia, one of the few blacks aboard.

(continued from page 1)

melted quickly, the roads were in miserable condition for the remainder of the month. Thus, the flow came to a virtual standstill, and what food could be found was being sold at 'famine' prices.

Richmond itself had undergone a vast change of character from the genteel, 1860 community of less than 40,000 (one-third of these were slaves) to a roaring war-time capital, jammed by the arrival of large numbers of laborers, bureaucrats and military personnel. By 1863, Richmond held an estimated 120,000 to 200,000 persons. Everywhere masses of poor people drifted aimlessly and restlessly. Richmond was a powder keg, awaiting only a spark to explode and the bread riot of April 2, 1863 was a natural outburst under the circumstances.

A native of Richmond, Virginia, Mr. Chesson secured his Bachelor's degree from William and Mary College (1969) and completed his doctoral work at Harvard University under David Donald. His doctoral thesis was "Richmond After the War, 1865-1869," and this theme was expanded into a book entitled *Richmond After the War, 1865-1890*, published in 1981 by the Virginia State Library. Among his articles in print are: "Harlots or Heroines? A New Look at the Richmond Bread Riot," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, (April, 1984); and "Editors Indulging in Double-leaded Matter: The Shootout at the Capitol in 1866," *Virginia Cavalcade* (Winter, 1981).

He served as a Teaching Fellow at Harvard University, prior to his present post at the University of Massachusetts (Boston). His fields of specialization include: slavery and the slave trade; the Civil War and Reconstruction; the South; and urban history. He has served as a seasonal park ranger for the National Park Service at the Colonial National Historical Park. He has also been on active duty with the U.S. Navy and now holds the rank of lieutenant commander in the Naval Reserve.

A symposium, "The Civil War in Washington, D.C. and Northern Virginia," will be held in Alexandria, Virginia May 15-16, 1987. The program, sponsored by the Alexandria Civil War Round Table and the Fort Ward Museum, will feature Dr. James I. Robertson on "Old Capitol Prison and Its Unwilling Guests," Colonel Joseph B. Mitchell on "The Defense of Washington: On to Richmond," Josh Billings on "Washington: The Social and Economic Scene," Dr. Ross Netherton on "Action in Arlington and Fairfax Counties," and others. The fee for the symposium is \$30 per person. For further information, contact Fort Ward Museum, 4301 W. Braddock Rd., Alexandria, Virginia 22304-1008 (703) 838-4848.

The Great Invasion, a conference on the origins, conduct, and aftermath of Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania, will be held at Penn State University, Mont Alto, Pennsylvania, June 4-7, 1987. Among the featured speakers will be Gary Gallagher and Robert Krick. The conference will include an in-depth tour of the Gettysburg battlefield.

The registration fee of \$295 includes lodging, all meals, receptions and the tour. For further information and registration, contact Penn State University, Continuing Education, Mont Alto Campus, Mont Alto, PA 17237 (717) 749-3134. The registration deadline is May 10.

March meeting

by Wayne Anderson

At the 459th regular meeting of The Civil War Round Table on March 13, Howard McManus spoke on The Battle of Cloyd's Mountain before 85 members and guests.

In the spring of 1864, General U.S. Grant devised a strategy to strike at the Confederacy using all of the North's resources. As part of that strategy, Grant wanted to sever the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad and halt the flow of supplies destined for General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. The Virginia and Tennessee ran through the Allegheny Mountains in southwestern Virginia and was one of the best maintained lines in the Confederacy.

The Union effort to sever the railroad consisted of two columns. One was an infantry force consisting of three brigades commanded by Brigadier General George Crook. This force had the mission of destroying the railroad bridge which spanned the New River, near Dublin, Virginia. The second Union column was a cavalry force of 2,000 men commanded by Brigadier General William Averell. Its mission was to move by way of Logan Court House and to destroy sections of track of the Virginia and Tennessee and any saltworks in the area.

The Confederate forces in southwestern Virginia were commanded by Major General John C. Breckinridge and numbered about 7,000. Fearing an attack by Union forces in the lower Shenandoah Valley, Breckinridge sent the majority of his infantry and artillery to meet that threat. To defend any Union advance through the gaps in the Alleghenys, Breckinridge placed Brigadier General Albert G. Jenkins in command and left him with 2,400 troops.

Crook's advance through the mountains was immediately hindered by bad weather. For eight days a combination of snow, rain and mud delayed the progress of the Union soliders. Finally, Crook's column pushed through the mountain gaps and approached the town of Dublin. The Confederates had entrenched a few miles north of the town on the crest of a steep hill named Cloyd's Mountain and awaited Crook's approach.

On the morning of May 9, 1864, Crook deployed his forces with two brigades abreast and one in reserve and advanced to the Confederate position. The Union brigade on the left, commanded by Colonel Carr B. White, attempted to turn the Confederate's right flank, but it was met with heavy fire and quickly repulsed. The Union brigade on the right, commanded by Colonel Horatio Sickel, attacked the Confederate line and it also was driven back.

Crook ordered the brigade commanded by Rutherford Hayes to advance and personally led the renewed Union attack. Protected from observation by a steep river bank and heavy forest, Hayes' and Sickel's men worked their way through the difficult terrain and delivered a devastating attack on the center of the Confederate line.

A sharp and vicious battle now took place as the Union soliders surged over the breastworks. The combat was hand-to-hand, and the outnumbered Confederates had to withdraw to another position. As the Confederates withdrew, it exposed their right flank to fire from Carr's brigade and soon the entire Confederate line collapsed. Jenkins, the Confederate commander, was mortally wounded and would die on May 21. The Confederates retreated through Dublin and crossed the New River bridge where they took up a new position on the opposite bank.

Crook's force pursued the Confederates and spent the

night of May 9 in Dublin. The next day, he advanced to the bridge and engaged in a two hour artillery duel with the Confederates. While this took place, a party of Union soldiers worked their way to the bridge and set it on fire. The bridge over the New River was not completely destroyed, but it was rendered unserviceable for several weeks. On May 11, Crook received a dispatch about Grant's stalemate in the Battle of the Wilderness and withdrew his entire force back to the Kanawha Valley in West Virginia.

Crook's campaign through the Allegheny Mountains was hard on the soldiers. At Cloyd's Mountain the Union forces suffered casualties of 10 per cent; the Confederates suffered 23 per cent casualties. Cloyd's Mountain is not a well-known Civil War battle, but, noted Howard, to the soliders of both sides, it was the hardest fight during their service in the war.

Glen Wiche and Jerry Warshaw, co-chairmen of the Archives committee, are seeking materials relating to the history of The Round Table. They are interested in printed matter, correspondence, committee reports, graphics, press clippings, photos, slides, etc. The material will be kept at the Chicago Historical Society.

If you have any material, please contact Glen at 1360 N. Lake Shore, #504, Chicago 60610 (312) 642-8417 or Jerry at 748 Hinman, Evanston 60602 (312) 866-6667. If you want to retain originals, they will be glad to accept or make copies.

You are invited to become a Friend of the Civil War Library and Museum in Philadelphia which has embarked on a major expansion program. The Library and Museum was founded in 1888 as part of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States; Rutherford B. Hayes was the first president. The collection includes such treasures as Grant's dress uniform and sword; Jefferson Davis' dressing gown; General Sherman's frock coat; weapons; flags; musical instruments; oil paintings and water colors; a library of 15,000 volumes and countless personal letters and documents. The present facility is inadequate to display the collection, and much of it is in storage.

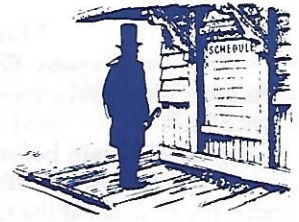
For a \$25 tax-deductible contribution, members will receive a quarterly newsletter. Checks, made payable to CWLM, should be sent to Civil War Library and Museum, 1805 Pine Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

The 10th Annual Ohio Civil War Relic and Collectors Show will be held at the Ashland College Convocation Center in Ashland, Ohio April 25-26, 1987. According to people who have attended previously, it is one of the best book and relic shows in the country. For further information, contact Don Williams, 1083 Oak Hill Circle, Ashland, Ohio 44805 (419) 289-3120.

Jerry Russell, national chairman of Civil War Round Table Associates, has been selected as one of the first recipients of the "Take Pride in America" awards created last year by Interior Secretary Donald Hodel to recognize individuals and groups conducting "awareness efforts on behalf of federal, state, local or Indian lands." Russell founded Civil War Round Table Associates in 1968, and that organization has been in the forefront of battlefield preservation activities ever since.

The New Books

compiled by Dick Clark



BULLETIN BOARD

Appleman, Edgar, ed. *Abraham Lincoln from his own Words and Contemporary Accounts*. Washington, DC: WANT Pub. Co., 1985. pbk. \$4.95. Original of the 40s.

Bailey, Ronald H. & the Editors of Time-Life Books. *Battle for Atlanta. Sherman Moves East*. Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1986, \$19.95.

Bearss, Edwin C. and Chris Calkins. *The Battle of Five Forks*. Lynchburg, VA: H.E. Howard, Inc., 1985. \$16.45.

Beers, Henry Putney. *The Confederacy: A Guide to the Archives of the Confederate States of America*. Washington: The National Archives, 1986. Reprint of 1968 ed. \$25.00.

Brinkley, Phyllis, *The Lincolns: Targets for Controversy*. Waunakee, WI: The author, 1985. 77 p. pbk. \$10.00.

Clark, James C. *Last Train South: The Flight of the Confederate Government from Richmond*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1984. 192 p. \$17.95.

Davis, William C. & the Editors of Time-Life Books. *Death in the Trenches: Grant at Petersburg*. Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1986. 176 p. \$14.95.

Davis, William C., ed. *Touched by Fire. A Photographic Portrait of the Civil War*. Volume two. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1986. 331 p. \$50.00.

Franklin, John Hope. *George Washington Williams: A Biography*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985. 348 p. \$24.95.

A Guide to Civil War Maps in the National Archives. Washington, DC: National Archives, 1986. Revised edition. \$30.00.

Hebert, Walter H. *Fightin' Joe Hooker*. Gaithersburg, MD: Butternut Press, 1987. \$30.00. Original of 1944.

Houghton, Edwin B. *The Campaigns of the 17th Maine*. Gaithersburg, MD: Butternut Press, 1987. 333 p. \$30.00. Original of 1866.

Iobst, Richard W. *The Bloody Sixth: The Sixth North Carolina Regiment Confederate States of America*. Gaithersburg, MD: Butternut Press, 1987. 493 p. \$35.00. Original of 1965.

Monsell, Helen Albee. *Robert E. Lee, Young Confederate*. Illustrated by James Arthur and Gay Morrow. 1st Aladdin Books ed. New York: Collier Macmillan, 1986. pbk \$3.95. Original of 1937.

According to an item in *Preservation News*, a preservation group called Save White Haven has come up with \$510,000 to buy the Missouri home that was occupied by U.S. Grant from 1854 to 1859. The group, which financed their bid with help from a state loan, will turn the house over to the state to be operated as a historic site. The owners of the property had threatened to subdivide the estate.

The annual Round Table picnic will be held on Sunday, July 12 in Busse Woods, near Schaumburg. New member Joan Carlson is heading up the committee making the arrangements; details will be announced as they become available.

Future meetings

Regular meetings are held at the Quality Inn, Halsted and Madison, the second Friday in each month, except as noted.

April 17: Mike Chesson on "The Richmond Bread Riot." **Note:** This is the third Friday of the month.

April 30-May 3: Annual Battlefield Tour—The Trans-Mississippi.

May 8: Betty Otto on "Maryland Remembers the Civil War."

June 5: Mark Boatner on "How the Civil War Dictionary Came Into Being." **Note:** This is the first Friday of the month.

July 12: Annual picnic.

New members

Robert A. Blake, 10217 Dearlove Rd., #102, Glenview, Illinois 60025 (312) 824-6501.

Rex Martin, 210 W. Bauer Rd., Naperville, Illinois 60540 (312) 357-2024.

D. Patrick McCormick, 245 Edgeware Rd., Elk Grove Village, Illinois 60007 (312) 437-1192.

William F. Todd, 921 Darius Ln., Naperville, Illinois 60565 (312) 983-0017.

Change of address

William G. Shepherd, 241 W. Center Ave., Lake Bluff, Illinois 60044-2451.

The Battlefield Preservation Committee recently voted to donate \$1500 to the Save Historic Antietam Foundation (SHAF) and another \$1500 to the Campaign to Restore and Preserve the Various Illinois-Related Monuments at Gettysburg. The money comes from the battlefield preservation fund, which is supported by the book raffle held at each meeting.

Last fall, SHAF successfully fought a rezoning that would have enabled developers to turn the Grove Farm south of Sharpsburg into a shopping center. However, the legal battle cost them about \$9000 (part of the \$1500 was in fact donated to SHAF last fall to help them meet legal expenses). Funds are needed to help SHAF pay off the debt and to support their other preservation activities. According to an article in the CWRT Associates newsletter, the Washington County Commissioners (who originally approved the rezoning) have now asked their planning agency to study the possibility of establishing a zoning designation for sensitive areas surrounding the battlefield. It appears SHAF's efforts are paying off.

The donation to the Campaign will help meet the approximately \$8000 cost of restoring the Illinois monuments at Gettysburg. A further fundraising effort will be undertaken by The Round Table; details will be announced. Gettysburg is asking each state to provide funds to restore their state's monuments. It will cost New York, which has many monuments, about \$140,000. Minnesota, which has few, will only have to come up with \$2400.