



# THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



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October 2020

794th REGULAR MEETING, Friday, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**Stuart Sanders on:**

*“Perryville Under Fire”*

**Zoom Meeting. Time: Oct 9, 2020 07:30 PM CST  
Meeting ID: 874 0291 7107  
Passcode: 273438**



The 1862 Battle of Perryville, Kentucky, laid waste to more than just soldiers and their supplies. The commonwealth's largest combat engagement also took an immense toll on the community of Perryville, and citizens in surrounding towns.

After Confederates achieved a tactical victory, they were nonetheless forced to leave the area. With more than 7,500 casualties, the remaining Union soldiers were unprepared for the enormous tasks of burying the dead, caring for the wounded, and rebuilding infrastructure. Instead, this arduous duty fell to the brave and battered locals.

Former executive director of the Perryville Battlefield Preservation Association, author **Stuart Sanders** presents the first in depth look into how the resilient residents dealt with the chaos of this bloody battle and how they rebuilt their town from the rubble leftover. The talk is based on his book "Perryville Under Fire: The Aftermath of Kentucky's Largest Civil War Battle."

Stuart Sanders worked for nearly 10 years to preserve and interpret Perryville, Kentucky's largest

Civil War battleground, before coming to the Kentucky Historical Society, first to oversee community field services, then as our History Advocate and now as the Director of Research and Collections. Stuart brings his experiences as a preservationist, interpreter, outreach specialist, author of three books and speaker to his current duties, communicating the relevance, value and significance of Kentucky's history. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in history and completed Developing History Leaders.

## **Battlefield Preservation**

### **From the American Battlefield Trust**



## **HISTORY & PRESERVATION COMMUNITY MOURNS LOSS OF LEGENDARY HISTORIAN EDWIN COLE BEARSS**

**Celebrated author, tour guide and National Park Service Chief Historian Emeritus led the creation of the modern battlefield preservation movement**

(Washington, D.C.) — Legendary military [historian and preservationist Edwin Cole Bearss](#) passed away Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2020, peacefully and surrounded by family, at the age of 97. A decorated U.S. Marine veteran of the Pacific Theater of World War II, he attended college and graduate school on the GI Bill before pursuing a distinguished career in the National Park Service, ultimately rising to be chief historian of that agency in 1981. As one of the powerful voices in the Ken Burns documentary, *The Civil War*, he brought history alive for millions of Americans with his deep voice and evocative descriptions, a style once described by the *Washington Post* as nearly “Homeric monologues.” Although a prolific author on topics in military history, Bearss was particularly dedicated to the importance of preserved landscapes

enhance our understanding of the past. He was among the originators of the modern battlefield preservation movement and a devoted tour guide, travelling up to 200 days per year into his 90s.

“For those of us who value the preservation and perpetuation of American history, few figures are more revered than Ed Bearss. His knowledge, passion and energy were without equal, and he will be missed tremendously by so many,” said American Battlefield Trust President James Lighthizer, “Ed’s decades-long commitment to protecting special places and making the stories of our past come to life laid the groundwork for organizations like ours, which will embody his legacy for generations to come. The Trust — our board and staff, as well as our members and supporters — send deepest condolences to the entire Bearss family.”

Bearss, born on June 26, 1923, grew up on a Montana cattle ranch just outside the Crow Indian Reservation that includes the Little Bighorn Battlefield. Although he gravitated toward history at an early age, his passion was the Civil War – he even called his favorite milk cow “Antietam.” After graduating from high school in 1941, he spent the summer hitchhiking across the country to visit battlefields. Bearss returned home and, after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, followed in the footsteps of his father and Medal of Honor–recipient older cousin to enlist in the U.S. Marine Corps. He left for the South Pacific in mid-July 1942 but was severely wounded on January 2, 1944 during the Battle of Suicide Creek on the island of New Britain, injuries that limited his dexterity for the remainder of his life.

After recovery and discharge, Bearss went to college and graduate school on a version of the GI Bill for veterans with disabilities. While researching his master’s thesis on Confederate Maj. Gen. Patrick Cleburne, he had an epiphany during a visit to Shiloh National Military Park. “I’d already realized from my service in the Marine Corps that if you’re hit by small arms fire, they pretty well have to see you,” he later recalled during an oral history project for the Trust. “I lived rather than died because I used the configuration of the terrain to get out of there.” [That hard-earned lesson in terrain helped him better understand how history could be gleaned from historic battlefield landscapes.](#)

Bearss resolved to become a historian within the National Park Service, helping others understand the inherent connection between physical landscapes and history. His first posting was at Vicksburg, Miss., where he met his wife, fellow historian Margie Riddle, who passed away in 2006. His tireless research led to the discovery and raising of the ironclad USS Cairo, which is preserved within a museum that is now a fixture of Vicksburg National Military Park. In 1958, he was promoted to regional historian and played a key role in shaping the two new parks created as part of the Civil War centennial: Pea Ridge National Military Park and Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield. In 1966, he was called to Washington, D.C., to join a new corps of research historians and became involved in various preservation battles.

Bearss was named chief historian of the National Park Service in 1981, and late that decade and into the next he was a key figure in the early years of the modern battlefield preservation

movement. He served on the Congressionally appointed Civil War Sites Advisory Commission and was an early board member of the Civil War Trust, a predecessor organization of the American Battlefield Trust. He retained a position on that governing body as historian emeritus until his death.

Whether acting on behalf of the Trust or other organizations, including the Smithsonian Institution, Bearss was perhaps the greatest battlefield guide to ever walk a historic landscape. Writing in Smithsonian Magazine in 2005, author Adam Goodheart described his presentation style as being a “battlefield voice, a kind of booming growl, like an ancient wax-cylinder record amplified to full volume—about the way you'd imagine William Tecumseh Sherman sounding the day he burned Atlanta, with a touch of Teddy Roosevelt charging up San Juan Hill.” Tours at Trust events led by Bearss invariably booked up, often within hours, even when all options included industry-leading experts.

Bearss is the recipient of numerous awards in the fields of history and preservation; the American Battlefield Trust has named its lifetime achievement award in his honor and dedicated a monument to his achievements on Champion Hill Battlefield in Mississippi. He wrote extensively, including a three-volume history of the Vicksburg Campaign, and was a regular guest on programs for the History Channel, A&E Networks and TLC, as well as appearing throughout Ken Burns’s iconic documentary *The Civil War*.

At the request of the Bearss Family, in lieu of flowers, donations in memory of Ed Bearss may be made to the American Battlefield Trust. Recognizing the special place that these battlefields held in his heart, such gifts will be used to secure additional lands associated with the Vicksburg Campaign. Please visit [www.battlefields.org/RememberingBearss](http://www.battlefields.org/RememberingBearss) for more information.

The American Battlefield Trust is dedicated to preserving America’s hallowed battlegrounds and educating the public about what happened there and why it matters today. The nonprofit, nonpartisan organization has protected more than 53,000 acres associated with the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and Civil War. Learn more at [www.battlefields.org](http://www.battlefields.org).

## **Virtual Civil War Events**

The Congress of Civil War Round Tables is sponsoring a series of virtual Civil War Lectures by some of the nation’s leading historians.

The lecturers have all donated their time and talent for you. That's right! CWRT Congress is not paying them an honorarium.

With the above in mind, we suggest that you register for a couple lectures, take notes and ask

some pertinent questions. Then, tell your friends about your experience and buy a couple books. That way, it's a win for the historian, a win for you and a win for your CWRT.

Visit <http://www.cwrtcongress.org/lectures.html> to view the complete schedule and register.

## **2020 CWRT Battlefield Tour Cancelled!**

The **2020 Battlefield Tour** of West Virginia has been cancelled, due to bus concerns. It is now scheduled for the first week in June, 2022. The 2021 Tour will be Fredericksburg, April 29-May 2.

## **Elections for CWRT Officers**

Due to Covid-related shutdowns, the Executive Committee has decided to hold the annual election using online voting at the October (zoom) meeting.

## **In Memoriam**

Longtime CWRT member Glen Wiche, and Kankakee Valley CWRT stalwart Art Schumacher, both passed away recently. They will be missed.

## **September Meeting**

**By Mark Matranga**

Fergus Bordewich addressed The Civil War Round Table at its 794<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting on September 11, 2020, on the subject of his recent book, "Congress at War: How Republican Reformers Fought The Civil War, Defied Lincoln, Ended Slavery, And Remade America." Bordewich, author of other noted books on American history, including "First Congress: How George Washington, James Madison, and a Group of Extraordinary Men Invented the Government," and "America's Great Debate: Henry Clay, Stephen A. Douglas and the Compromise That Preserved the Union," dissects the personalities who made up the Congresses during the Civil War and debunks what many may think incorrectly, namely, that Abraham Lincoln was the sole agent leading the nation to victory and toward emancipation.

Rather, Bordewich considers the role of Congress not only to have been vital in winning the war but also to have set the stage for the second 'founding' and to have made important strides toward modernizing the country. Some of the changes made during this time such as modernizing the financial system did not reach fruition until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, other effects were much more immediate, such as the 13th Amendment which was passed before war's end. And, of course, Congress carved out for itself an increasingly important role in running the war, in selecting and promoting more aggressive generals, in overseeing the conduct of the war, and in pushing the President toward emancipation.

Bordewich focuses on four specific individuals who he considers illustrate how Congress worked out its essential role. Three were Republican members of Congress: Senators Benjamin Wade of Ohio and William Pitt Fessenden of Maine, and Congressman Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania. The fourth was an extreme iconoclast, anti-war and pro-slavery Copperhead Democrat, Clement Vallandigham. With the departure of representatives of the seceded southern states the relatively new Republican Party and its more Radical element took control of Congress, with Wade and Stevens two of its most prominent leaders. Fessenden, once a conservative, leaned more radical as the war continued.

The Radicals pushed for more vigorous prosecution of the war and adopted the Confiscation Acts designed to take away property from secessionists and limit their ability to wage war. This included liberating their slaves, although the purpose behind abolition was different: Abolition had been a moral issue for a large portion of the party. And after several defeats, Congress set up the Committee on the Conduct of the War which oversaw military operations until the end of the war.

Thaddeus Stevens, Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, had long been an advocate for abolition of slavery. He argued that freedmen should receive land from confiscated plantations. Unfortunately, his party was unwilling to grant ex-slaves the now proverbial '40 acres' once promised. Upon his death in August 1868, the New York Times called him the "evil genius of the Republican Party" but acknowledged his pioneering role, "ever clearing the underbrush and preparing the soil, while Lincoln followed to sow the seeds that were to ripen in a regenerated Union." Bordewich terms him "a freethinker in a pious age, impatient with orthodoxies." Like no other man of his generation, Bordewich says, Stevens had a clear vision of a more diverse and tolerant America that would emerge in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Benjamin Wade, initial Chairman of the Committee on the Conduct of the War already had radical credentials when the war started. He not only supported abolition but also other progressive movements of the day, making him one of the most Radical Republicans. Elected President of the Senate, he would have been President had Andrew Johnson been removed from office. Bordewich suggests that this is one of the reasons that some Republicans voted not to remove the odious Johnson.

William Pitt Fessenden had served in the House and, as with the other two, had been an anti-slavery Whig; he was elected to the Senate in 1854. Less radical than Stevens and Wade, he also served for a time as Lincoln's Treasury Secretary. Returning to the Senate, he voted against Johnston's removal due in part because he was concerned that Wade's becoming President would split the Party.

Vallandigham does not fit the Radical profile. He served in Congress for only a limited time. He was an opponent of abolition and supporter of "Black Laws" in his native Ohio. He opposed all bills supporting the war and was known as a leader of the Democratic anti-war Copperhead

faction. After his last term, he was arrested for alleged disloyal practices in the Military District of Ohio then under martial law. He was tried and sent south and eventually made his way to Canada, where he mounted a campaign for Governor of Ohio. He returned to the United States and participated in Democratic politics until his death by accidental shooting in 1871.

The fates of the other three were less dramatic, except for Stevens whose end may have been hastened by Fessenden's failure to vote for Johnson's removal. "My life has been a failure," he said not long thereafter. Wade lost his seat in the Senate in 1868 despite Grant's election and although he remained active in politics he never returned to Congress and died in 1877. Fessenden died from a ruptured intestine in the summer of 1869.

Bordewich considers the 37<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Congresses among the most effective in our history, to be judged with the First Congress and those of the New Deal and the New Society. They enacted legislation "prodigious in volume and transformative in its effects." Much of this was due to eleven southern states seceding, leading to large Republican majorities. The far reaching effects of the Homestead Act, which "transformed the prairie into farmland," making the United States an "agricultural superpower," the Pacific Railway Act, which "spurred the settlement of every corner of the West," and the Morrill Act, which created public universities which modernized farming and democratized education, are all major achievements of these Congresses. Bordewich also notes that wartime financial measures "created a permanent role for the federal government in the nation's financial affairs." And Congress helped fight the war as well, appropriating funds to support all facets of military operations.

Later Congresses passed the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments, but the radicalism the leadership of the Republican Party that came to power in 1861 promised did not bear ultimate fruit. That it did not do so is a longer story and a tragic one. As matters transpired, none of the actors Bordewich studied and who had such an immense impact on the successes of the Civil War congresses were on the scene during the turbulent time of Reconstruction. We understand that Bordewich is taking up that period and its notable personalities. As he mentioned to this writer, "History is People." In "Congress at War" he brought us some of those; we await more of them.

## **BULLETIN BOARD**

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The **Kenosha Civil War Museum** is putting on a bunch of programs which can be watched on facebook:

The Other Civil War in Mexico

**Friday, October 9, Noon | Presenter: Phil Angelo**

Lincoln and the Presidential Campaign of 1860

**Friday, October 30, Noon | Presenter: Doug Dammann**

For more on programs at the museum, visit

<https://museums.kenosha.org/civilwar/events/>

**Rob Girardi** will be presenting online Oct. 9<sup>th</sup> to the Capitol District (Albany) CWRT, topic TBD.

## More Upcoming Local Civil War Events

Due to government-ordered shutdowns, CWRT events are being cancelled or going online on an ad hoc basis. Contact the sponsoring organization for up to date details. Check the **Announcements** section of the CWRT's website for additional coming events.

Oct. 2nd, Northern Illinois CWRT: David Keller on "Camp Douglas" (Zoom)

Oct. 7th, Kankakee Valley CWRT: "Winfield Scott"

Oct. 8th, Milwaukee CWRT: Rob Girardi on "Abraham Lincoln and the Common Soldier"

Oct. 13th, McHenry County CWRT: Dave Connon on "Confederates from Iowa"

Oct. 16th, Salt Creek CWRT: Jim Heinz on "None But the Brave: The Story of the Medal of Honor" (Zoom)

Oct. 20th, Lincoln-Davis CWRT: Rob Girardi on "Gouverneur Kemble Warren's Last Battle"

Oct. 22nd, South Suburban CWRT: Larry Hewitt on "Lt General Fighting Dick Anderson" (Zoom)

## Future Chicago CWRT Meetings

**Note: As of now, the Oct.-Dec. meetings will be "online"**

Nov. 12th: John R. Scales on *General Nathan Bedford Forrest*

Dec. 10th: Dave Powell on *Union Command Failure in the Shenandoah*

Jan. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021: Jennifer Murray on *General George Meade*

Feb. 12th: Leslie Goddard presents *Clara Barton*

Mar. 12th: Greg Biggs, *The Nevin-Freeman Address*

Apr. 9th: Ron Kirkwood on *Too Much for Human Endurance: The Spangler Farm Hospitals*

May 14th: Michael Hardy on *General Lee's Immortals*





Reminder: Stay healthy!