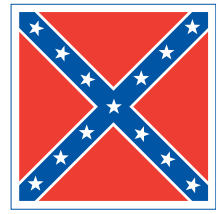


THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Founded December 3, 1940



Volume LXVIII, Number 5

Chicago, Illinois

January, 2008



667th REGULAR MEETING

ED COTHAM

ON

“THE SOUTHERN JOURNEY OF A CIVIL WAR MARINE”

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Friday, January 11

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

HOLIDAY INN MART PLAZA
350 NORTH ORLEANS STREET

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m.

Dinner at 6:30 p.m.

\$35 - Members/Non-members

Entrée:

Chicken Casriel, Catch of the Day, Vegetarian Plate or Fruit Plate

PLEASE NOTE

Make your reservation by **MONDAY, Jan. 7** by calling **630-460-1865**. Reservations can also be made by emailing chicagocwrtddinner@earthlink.net with the names of your party and their choice of entree. Reservations made after Wednesday, Jan. 9, will be surcharged \$5.

People who attend without having made a reservation will pay a \$5 walk-in charge. If a cancellation becomes necessary after dinner reservations have been made, please call the number before 9 a.m. Thursday to avoid a charge.

We are offering the option of choosing not to have dinner and coming only for the address at 7:30 p.m., for a charge of \$5 per person.

Parking at the Holiday Inn is \$10 with a validated parking sticker.

Ed Cotham on The Southern Journey of a Civil War Marine

BY BRUCE ALLARDICE

Henry O. Gusley, a young Pennsylvania printer turned U.S. Marine, went South in February 1862 on board a ship that was part of Commander David Dixon Porter's Mortar Flotilla. For the next year and a half Gusley participated in a series of battles and engagements all along the Gulf Coast from Florida to Texas and up the Mississippi River as far as Vicksburg. During this eventful period, Gusley recorded in his diary the capture of New Orleans and the bombardment of Vicksburg. He participated in blockade duties off the Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida coasts and witnessed battles at Galveston and Sabine Pass. Gusley's descriptions are rich and entertaining. Making these descriptions even more meaningful is the fact that serving in the same flotilla was Dr. Daniel Nestell, a physician who had an incredible talent for drawing on-the-spot sketches of the many places that he and Gusley jointly visited.

On January 11th author Ed Cotham, who has edited Gusley's diary, will make a powerpoint



Bruce Allardice

presentation on Gusley's diary and Nestell's sketches.

Edward T. Cotham, Jr. was born in Dallas, Texas. He is President of the Terry Foundation in Houston, Texas, the largest private source of scholarships at Texas universities. Ed holds an undergraduate degree in Economics from the University of Houston and a Masters Degree in Economics from the University of Chicago. A native Texan, Ed returned to Texas to obtain a Law Degree from the University of Texas in 1979.

Ed is a former President of the Houston Civil War Roundtable and is active in the Civil War preservation movement. His published works include Battle on the Bay: the Civil War Struggle for Galveston, published in 1998 by the University of Texas Press; Sabine Pass: the Confederacy's Thermopylae, published in August 2004; and The Southern Journey of a Civil War Marine: The Illustrated Note-Book of Henry O. Gusley, published by the University of Texas Press in January 2006.



Battlefield Preservation

BY DAVID ZUCKER

Coker House to come down at **Champion Hill Battle Field:** the Coker House, the last remaining structure to witness the Battle of Champion Hill was expected to be "Deconstructed" in November, and placed in storage.

Taking the building down was not part of the original plan, acknowledged Jim Woodrick, Review and Compliance Officer for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. But severe deterioration in the last few years, combined with the high bids for restoration, made the decision inevitable, he said.

Roger Walker, a private contractor who is overseeing the project, commented on the condition of the Coker House, "The birds can fly through it without slowing down."

The State hopes to rebuild the house with largely modern fabric by late next year, according to Woodrick.

The Coker House was given to the Department in 2000 by the Jackson Civil War Round Table. "The plan was to fully restore the exterior and the interior of the house and use it as a museum", Woodrick said. But staffing cuts at archives and history put the kibosh on the museum, and that in turn put the kibosh on the interior restoration.

Meanwhile, a bid for the exterior work proved too high. The department had to rebid the work, and time passed. The building went downhill.

Eventually the department concluded that the structure was so unstable that restoration would be too costly, and the focus shifted to taking the house down and then rebuilding.

Still, problems persisted. In February 2006 only one bidder was interested at \$446,000--more than twice what the department had estimated.

The department re-advertised and also reduced its requirements. Instead of saving all the historic portions of the building, the bidder was asked to salvage only representative parts, such as samples of doors, windows, mantels and cornices. In October, of two bids the department executed a contract at \$273,000. "The architect says we'll save the best and trash the rest", Walker said.

"I regret it", said Woodrick of the decision to take the house down rather than restore it. Asked if the state couldn't have done more to stabilize the building over the years he replied, "I don't have a good answer for that."

But Woodrick pointed to the red tape that his department had to deal with in handling the grant, and the fact that the Coker house was only one element in an array of Civil War projects that were all demanding attention.

The transportation enhancement grant was for 6.2 million and covered everything from the Coker House restoration to renovation of a train depot in Corinth, restoration of the Historic Shaifer House at Port Gibson Battlefield, expansion of a museum at Brice's Crossroads, and interpretive trails and signage at several battlefields.

The department contracted with the Miami based engineering firm PBS & J to manage all the projects. Walker, senior planner for PBS & J, said the

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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 Membership Committee, 9670 N. Dee #205 Des Plaines, Illinois 60016, or contact bsallardice1@earthlink.net.

Coker House portion of the funding was originally estimated at just over \$1 million. By 2003 the estimate had climbed to 1.8 million.

"Rebuilding is estimated to cost \$500,000." Walker said, with funding expected from the state. He noted that "very little" of the rebuilt Coker House would be original.

Woodrick suggested that once the House is back up, whether the fabric is original or not will fade in importance. "There are buildings in other Civil war parks that most of the public would never know were re-built," he said, "This has been an exasperating project but I think its going to turn out to be a terrific project."

The State owns 800 acres at Champion Hill, although it is not open to the public. Woodrick said that eventually his department would like to see the land and house transferred to the National Park Service as a unit of Vicksburg National Military Park, 20 miles to the West. Champion Hill, May 16, 1863, was the decisive battle of the Vicksburg Campaign.

DECEMBER MEETING

BY TOM TRESKOTT

In South Carolina six or seven years ago, a little old lady presented Gordon Rhea with a stack of papers from the Civil War. Among them were letters of and about Charles Whilden, an unsung hero of the Overland Campaign. Our speaker, who has been obsessed with U.S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, and Overland Campaign for thirty years, was instantly captivated by Whilden and his story. On December 14, at the 666th regular meeting of the Civil War Round Table, Mr. Rhea spoke to 77 members and guests on the unlikely Civil War adventure of "Charles Whilden and the Wilderness".

Charles Whilden was born in Charleston, South Carolina in 1824, into a middle-class family with seven siblings and a family slave. His prewar career included failures in law, mining, business, farming, and love. The end of the 1850's found Charles Whilden alone, broke, in debt, and a failure.

After Ft. Sumter, Whilden returned to Charleston, but had to get there by cutting across Texas and then via the Bahamas. When he arrived in Charleston in late 1861 or early 1862, he was suffering from epilepsy brought on by the rough sea voyage. Rejected for service with the Confederate Army, Whilden volunteered for the home guard, in which he served until February 1864. When the shortage of manpower in the South forced the Army of Northern Virginia to accept him, Whilden was assigned to the toughest corps (Hill's), the toughest division in that corps (Wilcox's), the toughest brigade in that division (McGowan's) and the toughest regiment in that brigade (the 1st South Carolina [McCreary's])

Whilden was sent to the ANV just in time for Spring, 1864, a year tough for everybody. Robert E. Lee's

army had been regrouping for ten months after Gettysburg, while U.S. Grant had been brought east with a "new" style of war --- to destroy the Army of Northern Virginia with a pincer movement. Lee, outnumbered 2-1, was waiting at the Wilderness, his army divided into three corps. Hill's Corps was first met by the 2nd Union Corps of Winfield Scott Hancock, and the 1st S.C. Infantry was sent in, the first taste of combat for Charles Whilden, who had volunteered to be the regimental standard bearer. Captain James Armstrong of the 1st had befriended Whilden, and, noting his age and condition, politely turned him down. But after four or five standard bearers had been killed or wounded, Armstrong relented and let Whilden carry the flag.

At Spotsylvania on May 11, Grant saw that the "Mule Shoe" salient was the weak point in the Confederate defense, and that taking it could split the Army of Northern Virginia in half. Misinformed, Lee thought Grant was retreating, and wanting to attack Grant, moved his artillery out of the Mule Shoe to dry ground.

At sunrise on May 12, Hancock's Corps attacked the salient. Lee ably micromanaged in response, pulling elements from other corps in order to build new lines. The western leg of the Mule Shoe sloped up, with the high ground the key. McGowan's Brigade was called in to push forward, with the 1st S.C. the right-most regiment. Capt. Armstrong, wishing to protect his friend, took the flag from Whilden. It was then that the 40 year-old epileptic from South Carolina wanted to carry the flag in the charge, and Armstrong relented. Leading the way, Whilden was clipped with a shot in the shoulder, and when the flagstaff was broken by bullets, he wrapped the flag

around himself. Inspired, the South Carolinians, and Alabamans and Mississippians behind him, followed and took the "Bloody Angle". For the next 20 hours Union forces tried to retake the position, which was full of water, blood and bodies. At 3:00 am Lee ordered his men to retreat to new lines in stronger positions.

The Battle of Spotsylvania saved the Army of Northern Virginia. In the meantime, Whilden had been brought to the rear, and was eventually treated at a hospital in Richmond and invalidated out of the army. He hadn't been in combat long, but it was "a hell of a week".

Sadly, Whilden's hard luck continued after his moment of glory. He returned to Charleston to resume his law practice, but, scared by the approach of William T. Sherman, he went to Columbia, South Carolina, and ended up being burned out there. After the war he once more moved back to Charleston. In the fall of 1866, while walking down his steps, he had a seizure, fell into a puddle, and drowned.

As for the flag itself, Whilden had brought it back with him, and it stayed in his family after his death. James Armstrong later asked them for it, and received it. In the 1920's Armstrong wanted to give the flag to Museum of the Confederacy in Columbia (now the Department of Archives and History). If it ever did, or where it eventually went or is, nobody knows.

In conclusion, the story of Charles Whilden shows that the men who fought the battles of the Civil War were just like we are today, and that acts of grace, courage, and even nobility are possible in us all when circumstances bring them forth.

GRAPESHOT



The **Abraham Lincoln Association** is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year with a 2-day symposium to be held in Springfield, IL, February 11-12. On Monday, February 11th, Jean Baker, Mark Neely and Douglas Wilson will take the podium, and the next day Brian Dirck, Brooks Simpson and Michael Vorenberg are scheduled to speak. Chicago-born historian Michael Beschloss, a regular on PBS and ABC, will be the keynote speaker at the association's banquet. For more information on this gala event, visit the association's website at <http://www.abrahamlincolnassociation.org>.

CWRT members Bruce Allardice and Leslie Goddard were married December 9th in a ceremony in Geneva, Illinois. The couple met 2+ years ago when Leslie, who was then working for the Evanston Historical Society, asked Bruce to speak at the EHS. Their first "date" was, geekily enough, a CWRT meeting—with Leslie's father Joe sitting between the two! The couple honeymooned in Jamaica, surviving a sprained toe (Bruce, while climbing a waterfall) and Jamaican rum drinks (Leslie).

To honor the sesquicentennial of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, a series of events will be held at the actual debate sites, on the weekend as close as possible to the actual debate date. The Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition has engaged veteran portrayers George Buss and Tim Connor to play Lincoln and Douglas. The kickoff event will occur in Springfield on June 16th. For more information, phone the LLHC at (217) 782-6817.

Know of any upcoming talks, events, or publications? All members are welcome to contribute items to the newsletter. Contact the editor at bsallardice1@earthlink.net or (847) 375-8305.

SCHIMMELFENNIG BOUTIQUE

Fifty-seven years of audio recordings of CWRT lectures by distinguished historians are available and can be purchased in either audio cassette or CD format. For lecture lists, contact Hal Ardell at hal229@ameritech.net or phone him at (773) 774-6781.

Each meeting features a book raffle, with proceeds going to battlefield preservation. There is also a silent auction for books donated by Ralph Newman and others, again with proceeds benefiting battlefield preservation.

Executive Committee Meeting

The mid-year meeting of the Executive Committee of the CWRT will be held Saturday, Jan. 26th, 2008, at the Chicago History Museum, starting at 9 a.m. CWRT members are welcome to attend.

Battlefield Tour

It's that time again to start signing up for next year's CWRT battlefield tour! We're going to Shiloh, Corinth and Brice's Crossroads May 1-4, 2008. HQ is the Holiday Inn Express in Corinth, and as usual **Ed Bearss** will be the lead tour guide, with the able assistance of the Shiloh NBP's **Stacey Allen**. Take a look at the attached tour registration form and sign up soon! The tour reading list and schedule information is on the website at www.thecwrt.org.

CWRT member Tom Gaard will make presentation on the Battle of Alatoona Pass to the Sterling/Rock Falls Historical Society this January 13th.

Bulletin Board



FUTURE MEETINGS

Regular meetings are held at the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 North Orleans Street, the second Friday of each month, *unless otherwise indicated*.

Jan. 11, 2008: **Ed Cotham**, "Civil War Marines"

Feb. 8: **David Long**, Topic TBD

March 14: **Brian Wills**, "Civil War in Cinema"

April 11: **Jennifer Weber**, "Copperheads"

May 9: **Stephen Engel**, "Franz Sigel"

June 13: **Bill Farina**, "U. S. Grant"

Virtual Book Signings

Jan. 26th will feature two books in the continuing series of Virtual Book Signings at the Abraham Lincoln Bookstore. Dr. Stephen Berry will sign his new book on Mary Todd Lincoln's family, House of Abraham: Lincoln and the Todds, and Dr. Gerry Prokopowicz will sign his new book Did Lincoln Own Slaves?: And Other Frequently Asked Questions about Abraham Lincoln. Dr. Prokopowicz hosts the popular internet radio program "Civil War Talk Radio", and was formerly the scholar-in-residence at the Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Dr. Berry's book provides the first modern look at the Todds, and how the war divided this prominent border-state family. The web address for accessing and watching these signings is www.VirtualBookSigning.net.