



THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



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Chicago, Illinois

May 2023

818th REGULAR MEETING, Friday, May 12th, 2023

Sean Michael Chick on "General P. G. T. Beauregard"

**Live/Zoom Meeting. Time: May 12th, 2023, 07:30 PM CST.
Zoom Option ID 845 3227 1496; No Passcode needed**



In April, 1861, Pierre Gustav Toutant Beauregard shot into fame as the Confederate commander who commanded the bombardment of Fort Sumter. Often given high-level commands thereafter, a combination of ill-health, and disagreements with President Davis, limited his service thereafter, though he played a key role in the defense of both Charleston and Petersburg.

This month, we will enjoy a presentation on this enigmatic and colorful general, a man whom his many admirers thought was a potential Napoleon. Few Civil War generals attracted as much debate and controversy as Beauregard. P. G. T. combined brilliance and charisma with arrogance and histrionics, the latter often alienating those he had to deal with.

Sean Michael Chick graduated from University of New Orleans with a Bachelor of Arts in History and Communications, and from Southeastern Louisiana University with a Master of Arts in History. He currently works in New Orleans, leading historic tours of his hometown and helping residents and visitors appreciate the city's past. He is also a boardgame designer, concentrating on the period of Western warfare from 1685-1866. His publications include The Battle of Petersburg, June 15-18, 1864 (Potomac Books, 2015) and Grant's Left Hook: The Bermuda Hundred Campaign, May 5-June 7,

1864 (Savas Beatie, 2021). His Dreams of Victory: General P.G.T. Beauregard in the Civil War (Savas Beatie, 2022) is the basis for this talk.

Battlefield Preservation

In the American Civil War, farmers became fighters. Homes became hospitals. Wives became widows.

And quiet family farms like the one belonging to Jacob Avey, on the southern edge of the town of Sharpsburg, became bloody battlefields.

Today, we have the incredible opportunity to acquire 20 acres at Antietam's Avey Farm.



The Avey Farmhouse, as it appears today.

The 2020 discovery of the Elliott Burial Map, drafted in 1864, revealed that the Avey Farm is the site of several Confederate burial sites. It is sacred ground, consecrated by bloodshed!

For generations, this hallowed ground has been in private hands. And it was not for sale. Now, suddenly, we are offered the chance to buy the 20 acres and the historic farmhouse where the Avey family lived.

The Avey farmhouse sits on land that witnessed the bloodiest day in American history.

The Trust is doing everything in our power to ensure we acquire this important land at Antietam. We need your help to make it a reality!

Learn more about the history of this hallowed ground and make a gift to ensure these 20 acres at Antietam are preserved forever.

Let's keep fighting for our hallowed ground!
David Duncan, President, American Battlefield Trust

April Talk

By Mark Matranga

Richard Holloway gave a most interesting lecture on “Richard Taylor’s End to the Red River Campaign” at the 817th Regular Meeting of The Civil War Round Table on April 14, 2023. Holloway called on a deep reservoir of knowledge of the benighted 1864 campaign when politics superseded military strategy and procuring cotton was more important than a swift end to the war.

As Holloway emphasized, the object of the campaign was cotton and defeating the enemy. Political ambition also played a role. Nathaniel Banks, an ardent abolitionist and one time Speaker of the House of Representatives and Governor of Massachusetts saw potential political advancement in leading the campaign. President Lincoln had acknowledged his influence by naming him one of the first ‘political’ generals.

Banks was appointed commander of the Department of the Gulf in November 1862, with orders to take the Confederate garrison at Port Hudson on the Mississippi River. Banks initially failed to reduce the fort in March 1863. He returned in May; after a siege the fort surrendered in July. With this success Banks undertook the administration’s plan to capture the Confederate capital Shreveport and bring the entire state under Union control. The administration had other motives: to warn off French Emperor Maximilian in Mexico who it was thought would recognize the Confederacy, and to confiscate reputed massive stocks of cotton upriver.

Holloway noted that General Sherman desired to lead the campaign, but Banks outranked him, having attained the rank of major general early in the war. In early March 1864 Banks led a 35,000-man army against Richard Taylor’s Confederate force of approximately 8,800. Taylor, son of a former president and brother-in-law of Jefferson Davis, had served under Stonewall Jackson in the 1862 Valley Campaign. Desiring to defend his home, he transferred to Louisiana where he served under Edmund Kirby Smith with whom he had a contentious relationship.

Banks’s principal subordinates, Maj. General William Franklin and Brig. General A.J. Smith, were to converge on Alexandria. Smith came by way of Vicksburg and

accompanied Admiral Porter's fleet up the Red, capturing Fort DeRussy on March 14. Franklin suffered delays and arrived late at the rendezvous as did Banks himself. This created a serious problem as Smith was on 'loan' for only a month; his two divisions were due to return to Sherman by mid-April. The fleet had been delayed as well and had been involved in purloining confederate cotton, quite a bit in fact.

As Holloway explained, Banks's army progressed upriver with the enemy retreating. The road led away from the river into a heavily forested area, creating danger: the army became strung out on the narrow road, with its wagons in the vanguard. As Banks approached Mansfield on April 8, Walker's Texas Division and Alfred Mouton's Division attacked. At first, Union cavalry was pushed in; next the wagons were overwhelmed. With reinforcements Banks's line held and the army retreated to Pleasant Hill where it was more successful the following day when Smith's troops counterattacked. Banks subsequently ordered a retreat.

The retreat became a fiasco when the fleet was stranded at Alexandria due to falling water levels. But for the ingenuity of LTC Joseph Bailey who devised a series of dams that lifted the boats over the rapid the fleet would have been captured or destroyed. Earlier in the retreat downriver, Porter lost the USS Eastport in the shallows of the Cane River. After several rearguard actions, the battle at Yellow Bayou on May 16 ended the campaign.

Taylor pursued Banks but was hamstrung by Kirby Smith who diverted half of his force north to Arkansas. This incited Taylor to write "intemperate" letters to his superior who promptly placed him under arrest. This had no effect as the administration promoted Taylor to Lieutenant General and transferred him to theater command east of the Mississippi. Porter profited from confiscated cotton. Saddled with a failed campaign, Banks's career was effectively over.

The Confederacy needed to defend the Trans-Mississippi to ensure the flow of foodstuffs and war material to armies east of the river. After Vicksburg fell this no longer served as the primary rationale. And this campaign on the frontier became somewhat a forgotten war, waged far from eastern population centers where huge armies clashed, but war it was, where soldiers from Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana fought and died in defense of homes and families. Union troops, unfortunately, pursued a less noble purpose. Richard Holloway tells us in an engaging style how they did this.



BULLETIN BOARD

Our in-person meetings are currently held at:

Holiday Inn Oak Brook

17W 350 22nd St., Oakbrook Terrace

Parking at the Holiday Inn is FREE

Dinner \$40.00 Members and Non- Members

Cocktails at 5:30, Dinner at 6:30

Presentation only is \$10 per person.

The **Kenosha Civil War Museum** is putting on the following in-person/virtual programs:

May 12th, noon, the 2nd Friday Lecture Series: Gene Salecker on "Vicksburg After the Fall."

For more on programs at the museum, visit
<https://museums.kenosha.org/civilwar/events/>

Bruce Allardice's article on the 51st Pennsylvania, "Uncle Sam is Very Good to Us" appeared in May's issue of *Civil War News*.

On May 11th **Leslie Goddard** will present "Louisa May Alcott" to the Village Arts Associates. For more on Leslie's presentations, visit www.lesliegoddard.info

Bruce Allardice will be speaking on "Civil War Generals" May 16th, to the Des Moines Civil War Round Table. For more, visit www.civilwarbruce.com.

More Upcoming Local Civil War Events

Check the **Announcements** section of the CWRT's website for additional coming events.

May 1st, Rockford CWRT: Brad Gottfried, "Lincoln Comes to Gettysburg, Part 2: Lincoln's 25 Hours in Gettysburg"

May 3rd, Kankakee Valley CWRT: **Leslie Goddard** as "Clara Barton"

May 5th, Northern Illinois CWRT: Wayne Rhine on "The Kearsarge"

May 9th, McHenry County CWRT: Don Hatch on "The USS Montgomery"
May 11th, Milwaukee CWRT: Sean Michael Chick on "The Battle of Nashville"
May 16th, Lincoln-Davis CWRT: Frank Varney on "U. S. Grant and the Rewriting of History"
May 18th, South Suburban CWRT: Gordon Ramsey on "The Role of Music in the Civil War"
May 20th, Salt Creek CWRT: Arthur Foley presenting "Patriot from Keokuk: Samuel Ryan Curtis"

Future Chicago CWRT Meetings

June 9th: Mark Zimmerman on "The Retreat from Nashville"
Sept. 8th: Al Olives on "The Boy Generals. George Custer, Wesley Merritt and the Cavalry of the Army of the Potomac"
Oct. 13th: Carleton Young on "Two Vermont Brothers in the Army of the Potomac"
Nov. 10th: Ernest Dollar on "Hearts Torn Asunder: Trauma in the Civil War"
Dec. 8th: Scott Mingus on "Texans at Chickamauga"

The **Abraham Lincoln Book Shop's** facebook page airs "Take a Break with History", every first and third Friday of the month at 1 pm CST. Their next "House Divided" author interview is May 25th, 3:30 CST, with Pat Brennan discussing his new book, "Gettysburg in Color." For more, visit <https://alincolinbookshop.com/>

Save the Date!

June 17th, Cantigny in Wheaton, from 9-3:30: **Symposium of the Abraham Lincoln Association.** The distinguished list of speakers will include Michael Burlingame, Michelle Krowl, **Dan Weinberg**, Guy Fraker, **Robert I. Girardi**, William Griffing and Diana Dretske. More details when they become available.

CWRT Annual Election at June Meeting

The CWRT's annual election of officers will be held at the June meeting. As usual, the nominating committee has come up with a proposed slate of officers. Members are free to nominate other candidates at that meeting.