

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



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842nd REGULAR MEETING, Friday, December 12th, 2025

Brian Jordan on ***Marching Home: Union Veterans and Their Unending Civil War***

Live Meeting. Time: Dec. 12th, 2025, 07:30 PM CST.



The Civil War visited unprecedented violence on the United States. That violence was also inscribed on the bodies and minds of the nearly two million men who donned Union blue between 1861 and 1865. How did Union veterans make sense of their physical, psychological, and emotional wounds as the nation plunged into the years of Reconstruction? How did the politics of the postwar years complicate their reintegration to civilian life and personal healing? Why were so many veterans so unwilling to let go of the war and its legacy, and what urgent messages do those ex-soldiers have for us today?

Brian Matthew Jordan is Associate Professor of U.S. Civil War History, Co-Director of the SHSU Civil War Consortium, and Chairperson of the History Department at Sam Houston State University, where he has taught since 2015. Professor Jordan earned his undergraduate degree in Civil War Era Studies at Gettysburg College (under the tutelage of Gabor S. Boritt and Allen C. Guelzo), and M.A., M.Phil., and Ph.D. degrees in History at Yale (under the direction of David W. Blight). His first book, Marching Home: Union Veterans and Their Unending Civil War, was a finalist (one of three runners-up) for the 2016 Pulitzer Prize in History. In its dissertation form, that book won the George Washington Egleston Prize (for Best U.S. History Dissertation at Yale) and John Addison Porter Prize (one of Yale's highest academic honors).

Presently, he is at work on Written in Blood: A New History of the U.S. Civil War, a one-volume history of the conflict for Liveright/W.W. Norton, as well as More Than An Eagle on the Button: Black Military Experiences in the Civil War Era (with Lorien Foote and Holly Pinheiro, Jr.). A short history of the battle of South Mountain for the Emerging Civil War series is set to appear next year.

Dr. Jordan is a native of Akron, Ohio, and lives north of Houston with his wife and four-year old daughter, Elizabeth (who, despite her youth, has already stomped several battlefields).

Battlefield Preservation

A Critical Window to Save Two Key Battlefield Properties

Two historically significant properties at **Antietam** — located at the heart of the battle's Final Attack — are under threat. These tracts, just over two acres combined, represent a pivotal moment in American history. Though modest in size, their importance is immense.

One property was nearly lost, with the landowner just hours from listing it for sale. A contract has now been secured for both sites, but preservation depends on raising the remaining funds before the year ends.

An anticipated federal grant and support from the **Save Historic Antietam Foundation** have secured \$510,000. Just over \$500,000 remains to fully fund the \$1,025,000 purchase and protect this ground forever.

'Til the battle is won.

David Duncan, President, American Battlefield Trust

October Presentation

By Mark Matranga

The Civil War Round Table's 840th Regular Meeting on October 10, 2025, featured Kim Harris portraying "Libbie" Custer. Elizabeth Bacon Custer, loving spouse of the Colonel, is widely

known for having kept the flame of her late husband's life and career burning bright over the years after his death at the Battle of the Little Bighorn on June 25, 1876. Less known is her work documenting their life on the Great Plains following the Civil War.

Born into a prominent family in Monroe, Michigan on April 8, 1842, Elizabeth Bacon was one of four children and the only one who survived past childhood. Her mother Sophia died when she was 12, after which her father, Daniel, a successful businessman and judge, enrolled her in Boyd's Academy where she graduated in 1862. But before that, when she was 12, she related having met George who had moved to Monroe from Ohio in 1839, and when seeing him in the neighborhood, calling out "Hey, Custer boy," little knowing that much later during the great conflict tearing the country apart they would meet again and forge an alliance that would last generations.

According to Libbie, George "did not excel in anything" at West Point, finishing last in his class of 1861. She said this was because "he was bored," but failed to mention the rather large number of demerits her future husband amassed at the Academy. When war broke out, George joined the 2nd US Cavalry Regiment. Libbie and George met again when he returned home on leave in 1862. Her father did not approve of his daughter associating with a mere lieutenant - and as she reminisced, George was from the 'wrong side of town.'

George's career began its meteoric ascent in 1862 when he became an aide to General McClellan and led Michigan troopers in the Peninsula Campaign. He then became aide to General Pleasonton in June 1863 who secured Custer's promotion to brigadier general of volunteers, one of the youngest generals in the Union Army at age 23. It was then that her father reconsidered and gave George approval to court his daughter. Libbie recalled that George was a lot like her dad when he said, "First make sure you are right, then go ahead." And she was sure both she and he were right.

Libbie admired the way George led his Michigan Brigade, wearing his wide brimmed hat and red silk scarf, shouting out to the 'Red Tie' boys "come on you Wolverines" as he charged from the front. As for Libbie, after she and George married on February 9, 1864, she moved to Washington D.C. and cajoled General Sheridan to relax his rule and allow her to accompany her husband to the front. She proudly related his role in winning the war and stayed with him as they were posted to Texas and then to Ft. Riley in Kansas. George had reverted to his permanent rank of Lt. Colonel but noted that the soldiers in the post-war army were not as devoted as previously; the lure of the west, money and the mines created morale problems in the ranks. Eventually, they were transferred to Ft. Abraham Lincoln in the Dakota Territory. Life on the plains had certain pleasures for George, now united with brothers Tom and Boston and nephew Autie, with whom he could relax and hunt.

Then came May 17, 1876, when the 7th Cavalry rode out from the fort on what would be its last campaign. She wrote, "The column...seemed unending, [T]he wagons themselves seemed to stretch out interminably." As she watched this spectacle, Libbie had a premonition that George would not return; she recalled later that her father had said Custer would die a soldier. It would not be until July 7 when she learned that she and 25 others were now widows. She lost composure when Major McCaskey delivered the sad news, "they were all dead." There was nothing left to do but to board the steamer *Far West* and go home - "They were no longer in the

war,” she sadly recounted. She was left to return to Monroe and to give George’s horse Dandy to his father.

Custer’s career was controversial but there was much to commend it. But what of Libbie? She lost the love of her life and was reduced to a \$30 monthly pension and relegated to part time typist work. The next year she moved to New York, staking out a career as a writer and sought-after public speaker and supporter of the suffrage movement. In addition to numerous magazine articles, her three memoirs, *Boots and Saddles*, *Tenting on the Plains*, and *Following the Guidon*, not only served to burnish her husband’s heroic image but have also given us valuable descriptions of army life on the frontier.

Born when John Tyler was in office, she lived to see 22 presidents, revolutions in transportation and communication, three major wars, and the monumental expansion of our nation to include Texas and all or part of eleven more states. And she watched as George and his comrades engaged in a death struggle with native peoples fighting to preserve their way of life. She died four days shy of her 91st birthday, after which she was laid to rest beside her husband at West Point.

“When the Legend becomes Fact, print the Legend,” the saying goes. And what a Legend! The hero in buckskin, long blond locks flowing in the wind, six-shooters in each hand, surrounded by hostiles: The Last Man Standing. We may no longer subscribe to the myth, but let us grant Libbie Custer some grace for having participated in perpetuating it – she deserves it. For her work, Libbie became a bit of a legend herself.

. November Presentation

By Mark Matranga

The 841st Regular Meeting of The Civil War Round Table on November 14, 2025, featured Chris Kolakowski on “Civil War to World War, Simon Bolivar Buckner, Sr. and Jr.” This talk emphasized the enduring legacy of service and leadership of the Buckner family from the Civil War through World War II. Kolakowski’s theme centered on those personal relationships that formed a lasting legacy of the civil war generation.

Simon Bolivar Buckner was born on April 1, 1823, near Munfordville, Kentucky. Graduating from West Point in 1844, he soon returned to the Academy as an assistant professor. He served with distinction in the Mexican American War (where he met Ulysses Grant), was cited for gallantry for action, and was given the honor of lowering the American flag over Mexico City at the end of the occupation. Following the war, he returned to West Point to teach infantry tactics. Buckner married Mary Jane Kingsbury in May 1850 and eventually resigned from the Army in March 1855, leaving to work with his father-in-law who had extensive real estate holdings in Chicago (This plot is now located along Kingsbury Street in the River North section of Chicago).

When his father-in-law died in 1856 Buckner inherited his property and moved to Chicago to manage it. Before he left his residence in New York, he met Grant to whom he advanced funds for travel home after Grant had resigned his commission. While

residing in Chicago, he organized a militia regiment for potential action in the Mormon War; this unit which he commanded as colonel, did not see service. He subsequently returned to Kentucky when the sectional conflict reached a critical stage. He was serving as Adjutant General of Kentucky when war broke out in 1861.

Although offered a generalship by the Lincoln administration, Buckner accepted a commission in the Confederate Army. This led to the embarrassing 'unconditional' surrender to Grant at Fort Donelson in February 1862 (something Grant later apologized for; apparently, he thought Gideon Pillow, who he despised, was in command at the time). Buckner commanded a division at Perryville after being exchanged and performed well within that rather chaotic command. But with health failing, he took leave and worked on the defenses of the Mobile forts.

Buckner commanded a corps at Chickamauga in 1863 and was transferred to Kirby Smith's command in the Trans-Mississippi in 1864. Promoted to Lieutenant General, at war's end he surrendered the last Confederate army to General Canby, giving Buckner the dubious distinction of having surrendered the first and last armies in the war. The terms of his parole prohibited him from returning to Kentucky for three years; he lived in New Orleans and returned to Kentucky in 1868 where he became editor of the *Louisville Courier*. He petitioned to have his civil rights restored and with this accomplished entered politics; he was subsequently elected governor of Kentucky in 1887 and ran for Vice-President on the Democratic 'Gold' ticket in 1896.

When President Grant died in July 1885, Buckner served as a pall bearer. Just prior to this, on June 18, he married again, his wife having died in 1874 after a long illness. His second wife, Delia Claiborne, was just 28 years old. A son was born to them on July 18, 1886: Simon Bolivar Buckner II. His father lived until January 8, 1914, the last surviving confederate general of that rank.

Kolakowski sees a connection between the Civil War and World War II generations through a "personal lens," that passes from one generation to the next, in this case the Buckner family. He instructs that to understand Buckner Jr. we must understand Buckner Sr., who advised his son: "Do your duty in whatever field it may lie, and never forget you are a gentleman." Kolakowski asserts that this precept enabled Buckner Sr. to survive the vicissitudes of his life. In turn, he quotes Buckner Junior's philosophy: "To render the greatest possible service to his government is the duty of every officer, and this should be his highest ambition."

Thus it was that Buckner Jr., West Point, 1908, was denied a combat role in World War I; President Wilson ordered him to remain in country training troops. However, after the war he was among those who built the foundation for the modern Academy, being instructor of tactics until 1923. He went on to both Command and General Staff and War Colleges before being appointed Commandant of West Point in 1932. And when war broke out in 1939, Buckner was tasked with building defenses in the Aleutian

Islands, a 10-year project he completed in 18 months. Its defenses increased from 400 soldiers and two dozen aircraft to a 22,000-man force before the Japanese vacated Kiska in 1943.

With this success, Buckner Jr. was promoted to Lieutenant General and given command of 10th Army for the invasion of Okinawa, with responsibility for coordinating all army, navy, and air forces for what was to be the largest amphibious assault in the Pacific War. This was Operation Iceberg, which commenced on April 1, 1945, and where Buckner sustained fatal injuries on June 18 while inspecting the front line. He was first buried on the island but later interred in Frankfort, Kentucky near his father's grave.

Kolakowski considers that for the WWII generation the Civil War was recent; it served to inspire, guide and educate – Buckner Jr. had been reading “Lee’s Lieutenants.” And of his father’s choice in 1861? When Buckner Sr. learned of the Lincoln administration’s actions he reacted: “I considered it the right of every citizen to resist by force of arms these lawless encroachments on the rights of free men. I therefore cast my lot with those who opposed these arbitrary assaults upon individual rights.” Interesting words.



BULLETIN BOARD

Our in-person meetings are currently held at:

Blossom Cafe

8349 West Lawrence, Chicago

Parking at the Blossom Cafe is FREE

Dinner \$50.00 Members and Non- Members

Cocktails at 5:30, Dinner at 6:30

Presentation only is \$10 per person.

The Kenosha Civil War Museum will feature Charlie Banks on December 12th, presenting on “Civil War Railroads and Their Tactics”

The event is part of their Friday lunchbox series and will run from noon to one.

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

More Upcoming Local Civil War Events

Dec. 5th, Northern Illinois CWRT: Bruce Allardice on "Aloha Oe! Hawaii and the Civil War"

Dec. 9th, McHenry County CWRT: Dave Mowery on "Cincinnati in the Civil War" (zoom only)

Dec. 9th, Gail Borden Library in Elgin: Armchair General Discussion Group: Annual Trivia Game

Dec. 11th, Milwaukee CWRT: Brian Jordan on "Marching Home: Union Veterans and Their Unending Civil War"

Dec. 16th, Lincoln-Davis CWRT: Father Bob Miller on "Faith of Our Fathers"

Dec. 20th, Salt Creek CWRT: Memorabilia Show and Tell

Dec. 18th, South Suburban CWRT: Holiday Party

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

Future Chicago CWRT Meetings

Jan. 9th, 2026: Guy Fraker on "Lincoln the Lawyer"

Feb. 13th: Keith Bohannon on "Wheeler's Cavalry in the Atlanta Campaign"

Mar. 13th: Clifford Roberts on "Castle Pinckney, Charleston"

Apr. 10th: Wayne Motts, The Nevins-Freeman Address

May 12th: Chris Mackowski on TBA

June 12th: Alex Rossino on "Confederate Plans for Maryland"

The **Abraham Lincoln Book Shop** has some great items for your Christmas stocking.

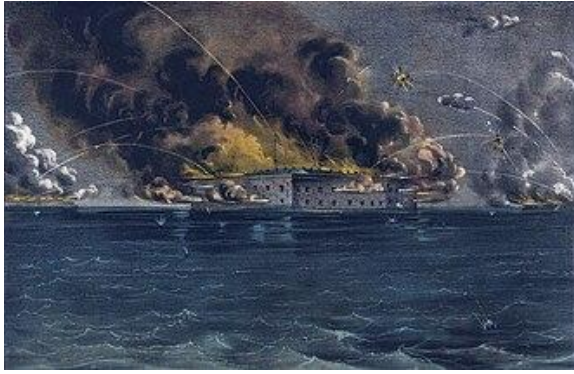
For more, visit <https://alincolnbookshop.com/>

The 2026 Battlefield Tour

Mark your calendar: April 29-May 2, 2026, Charleston/Savannah. These beautiful tourist locations have a great Civil War history. Charleston Harbor's Fort Sumter is where the war started! Our CWRT last visited in 1995, and since then the Hunley Museum and lots of great Civil War venues have opened.

We encourage people to use this tour as the core of a vacation—spend a few days extra down there, in weather that's got to be better than Chicago's!

We will be headquartered at the Holiday Inn North Charleston. More details to come.



Fort Sumter bombardment



CSS Hunley

December Meetings from the Past:

2020— Dave Powell on “Union Command Failures in the Shenandoah”

2015—Dennis Frye on “John Brown”

2010—Samuel Hyde on “A Wisconsin Yankee in the Confederate Bayou Country”

2005—Steve Fratt on “Civil War Tactics and Strategy”

1941—Ralph Newman on “General Ben Butler”

A Merry Xmas and Happy Holidays to all!!!!