



THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Volume LXXXV, Number 9

Chicago, Illinois

May 2026

847th REGULAR MEETING, Friday, May 8th, 2026

Note: We'll be meeting at the Bensenville Public Library (200 S. Church Rd., Bensenville) this month

Chris Mackowski on

"A Tempest of Iron and Lead: The Battle of Spotsylvania Court House"

Live Meeting. Time: May 8th, 2026, 07:30 PM CST.



For twenty-two straight hours, in torrential downpours, up to their knees in mud and blood, Federals and Confederates slugged it out in the most intense sustained hand-to-hand combat of the war. A panoply of horror, one soldier called it. A Saturnalia of blood. Hell's Half-Acre. The slaughter pen of Spotsylvania. Most remember it simply as the Bloody Angle.

Chris Mackowski, Ph.D., is the editor-in-chief and co-founder of Emerging Civil War and the series editor of the award-winning [Emerging Civil War Series](#), published by Savas Beatie. Chris is a writing professor in the Jandoli School of Communication at St.

Bonaventure University in Allegany, NY, where he also serves as associate dean for undergraduate programs. Chris is also historian-in-residence at [Stevenson Ridge](#), a historic property on the Spotsylvania battlefield in central Virginia. He has worked as a historian for the National Park Service at Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park, where he gives tours at four major Civil War battlefields (Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania), as well as at the building where Stonewall Jackson died.

Chris has authored or co-authored nearly two dozen books and edited a half-dozen essay collections on the Civil War, and his articles have appeared in all the major Civil War magazines.

Battlefield Preservation



Fort Pulaski

Dear ___:

I have exciting news to share! Thanks to the incredible generosity of supporters like you, [Our Enduring Legacy Challenge has reached its \\$125,000 goal!](#) This remarkable milestone means even more funding will go directly toward preserving America's hallowed battlefields as we approach the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution.

We're celebrating this moment and hoping to keep the momentum going. Before **July 4**, our goal is to welcome [10 additional supporters to who choose to create a lasting](#)

[legacy](#) of battlefield preservation by including the American Battlefield Trust in their will, trust, or other estate plans.

If you have been considering making this meaningful commitment, now is the perfect time to act! Your legacy gift will help ensure that these sacred places where our nation's story unfolded are protected and enjoyed for generations to come.

Please let us know if we can answer any questions or assist you in creating your own legacy of preservation with the American Battlefield Trust.

David N. Duncan, President, American Battlefield Trust

April Presentation

By Mark Matranga

The Civil War Round Table presented its **annual Nevins-Freeman Award** to **Wayne Motts** at its 846th Regular Meeting on April 10, 2026. Motts, CEO of the National Museum of War Museum in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, is the 52nd recipient of the Nevins-Freeman Award, established 1974, which honors individuals who deserve special recognition for civil war scholarship and service to the Round Table Movement. Motts' presentation "Illinois Artifacts in the National Civil War Museum" gave the Round Table a look into the lives of Illinoisans, some famous, some obscure, but all of whom contributed to the war effort. In turn, their artifacts now add to our understanding and appreciation of events more than 160 years ago. The museum is no small repository of objects: it comprises 65,000 square feet and houses 31,000 objects.

The first object Motts discussed was the trunk Ulysses Grant used from the time he was commissioned in the Regular Army in 1843 until he resigned his commission in 1854. Motts had us consider the trunk and asked: What does it tell us? He next brought up Benjamin H. Grierson of Jacksonville, famous for the daring April-May 1863 cavalry raid through Mississippi that allowed Grant to cross the Mississippi undetected. Upon ending his ride at Baton Rouge, its commander, General Auger, presented Grierson with an 1849 Pocket Revolver, with an inscription "For a task well executed, thanks to a friend of old," engraved on the handle.

An odd but most interesting object collected from the life of John Buford, a Kentuckian transplanted to Rock Island, Motts showed an order, published in the Gettysburg Star and Sentinel on June 30, 1863, and posted all around Gettysburg, making the sale and distribution of alcohol illegal. Motts also highlighted more significant documents from

Buford's career: his original commission as 1st Lieutenant in the Dragoons signed by President Pierce and Secretary of War Jefferson Davis in 1853, and his promotion to Major General signed by Edmund Stanton and President Lincoln. Although dated June 15, 1864, after Buford's death in December 1863, the order was dated July 1, 1863.

Born in 1834 in Lacon, Marshall County into a farming family, James D. Vernay is not a household name. Joining the army early in the war as a 1st Lieutenant, Co. B, 11th Illinois Volunteer Infantry, he served with Grant's army in the Vicksburg campaign. Assigned to command on the *Horizon*, a steamer transport carrying a light artillery battery that ran the batteries at Vicksburg on April 22, 1863, he was cited for "gallant action" and awarded the Medal of Honor. The Museum has not only his original medal but also the 1904 redesign sent to all recipients. Apparently, all recipients were to return the originals, which Vernay did, reluctantly; however, his original was returned, due to pressure brought by veterans groups. A photograph showed Vernay wearing his GAR medal as well.

Last was William M. Reid, born in Rhode Island in March 1836 but raised in Waukegan. A University of Michigan graduate, Reid enlisted in the 15th Illinois Volunteer Regiment and fought at Shiloh, among other places. The museum has his entire collection of papers and photographs, including a 56-page handwritten manuscript which contains a vivid passage describing the October 1863 battle at Hatchie Bridge where he captured a confederate soldier and his weapon. Of this encounter, he wrote: "I have a Sharps rifle I captured from the 1st Arkansas Rifles...they said it was one of the guns the good fellows of Boston sent to John Brown during the Kansas War. It was taken from him and sent to the arsenal at Little Rock, Arkansas and then taken to Vicksburg where it was put into confederate service."

Reid also performed recruiting duty for Company F, whose advertisement, entitled "Rally for the Old Fifteenth" in the March 19, 1863, *Waukegan Weekly Gazette*, reflected enlisted bonuses for veterans (\$402) and new recruits (\$302). Reid then organized the 146th Illinois Regiment and became its Lt. Colonel. In training at Camp Butler in Springfield at the time of the assassination the 146th was assigned to honor guard duties. Motts showed Reid's program for the funeral and the order of march. Reid describes this event, writing "The 146th Regiment and its band...led the procession, and I had the honor of command. The watchers...stood around the coffin...that night in Springfield. I can never forget the long watches of that night." Motts produced a carte de visite showing regimental troops guarding Lincoln's tomb.

Everyone knows where General and Mrs. Grant lie in rest. Grierson is buried in his hometown where his house is on the national register of historic places. Buford has been justifiably placed under a monument at West Point. Vernay, struck down by an automobile on I Street in Washington, D.C. in 1918, is buried in Arlington Cemetery.

Reid and his wife, Mary Claire, perished on December 30, 1903, in the Iroquois Theater fire in Chicago, and are buried in Waukegan. All contributed to the war and still do through Wayne Motts, who brings them to life with the stories their objects tell.



BULLETIN BOARD

The Kenosha Civil War Museum will feature **Dan Freas** on May 8th, presenting on "The Organ of the Soldiers: An Introduction to Civil War Camp Newspapers." 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/>

Our in-person meetings are currently held at:
Blossom Café, 8349 West Lawrence, Chicago
Parking at the Blossom Cafe is FREE
Dinner and meeting: \$50.00 Members and Non-Members
Cocktails at 5:30, Dinner at 6:30
This month, we're meeting at the Bensenville Public Library, 200 S. Church Rd. A buffet dinner (mostaccioli or chicken) will be served.
dinnerreservations@cwrt.org

On May 11th **Rob Girardi** will speak to the Northeast Indiana CWRT on "Railroad Defense in the Atlanta Campaign."

On April 30th **Dennis Doyle** spoke on "Plainfield and Will County During the Civil War" at the Plainfield Public Library.

More Upcoming Local Civil War Events

May 1st, Northern Illinois CWRT: Pat McCormick on "General John Logan"

May 4th, Rock Valley CWRT: Steve Alban on "Frank Vitzelly"

May 7th, Milwaukee CWRT: Chris Mackowski on "The Battle of Spotsylvania"

May 11th, Gail Borden Library in Elgin: Armchair General Discussion Group

May 12th, Southwest Michigan CWRT: Mark Laubacher on "Dr. George B. Todd"

May 12th, McHenry County CWRT: Kathy Springhorn on "Kinston Hangings: Civil War"

North Carolina 1864"

May 15th, Salt Creek CWRT: **Brian Seiter** on "Wilson's Creek"

May 17th, Kankakee Valley CWRT: Christina Smith on "Food of the Civil War Era"

May 19th, Lincoln-Davis CWRT: **Bruce Allardice** on "Aloha Oe! Hawaii and the American Civil War"

May 22nd, South Suburban CWRT: **Dennis Doyle** on "The Battle of North Anna"

May 28th, South Suburban CWRT: Zack Nunamaker on "Jesse James and the Civil War"

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

Future Chicago CWRT Meetings

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

Sept. 11th: James Marten on "The Iron Brigade"

Oct. 9th: Ron White on "Joshua Chamberlain"

Nov. 13th: Father Bob Miller, topic TBA

Dec. 11th: Stuart Dempsey, topic TBA

Jan. 8th, 2027: Dan Masters, topic TBA

Feb. 12th: Rob Girardi, topic TBA

March 12th: Doug Dammann, Nevins-Freeman Address

Apr. 9th: Dave Powell, topic TBA

May 14th: Caroline Janney, topic TBA

June 11th: Kevin Donovan, topic TBA

The **Abraham Lincoln Book Shop** will interview author Lois Romano 3:30 pm CST on May 28th on her new book on Mary Todd Lincoln, *An Inconvenient Widow*. They also feature an archive of past presentations. For more, visit <https://alincolnbookshop.com/>

Ed Bearss Fund

Every year at this time we ask for special donations to the Ed Bearss Fund, named in honor of the legendary "General" Bearss. The money collected is donated to battlefield preservation, the choice being up to the head guide of our battlefield tours. If you haven't done so already, please consider giving.

May Meetings from the Past:

2021 (5 years ago)— Michael Hardy presented “General Lee’s Immortals”

2016 (10 years ago)— Glenna Schroeder-Lein presented “The Soldiers' Home in Civil War America”

2011 (15 years ago)— Thomas Schott presented “Alexander Stephens and Jefferson Davis: A Marriage Made in hell”

1941 (75 years ago)— Newton C. Farr presented “The Secession Movement and Some of Its Fathers”

Herdegen, Calkins

Our friend **Lance Herdegen** passed away recently. Lance was considered by many as be one of the foremost experts on Wisconsin in the Civil War, Lance headed of the Civil War Institute at Carrol College, wrote numerous books, and made many appearances at Civil War round table events (including Chicago’s). Lance will be missed by all who knew him and by those who were influenced by his many books.



More sad news for the CWRT community. Civil War historian **Christopher M. “Chris” Calkins** died on April 1, following a years-long battle with Parkinson’s disease.

Calkins had a 34-year career with the National Park Service, working at Appomattox Court House National Historical Park and Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park, before concluding his NPS career as historian and Chief of Interpretation at Petersburg National Battlefield. In 2008 he accepted the position of first full-time Park Manager at the newly established Sailor’s Creek Battlefield Historical State Park – a park he “developed from scratch,” as he liked to put it.

