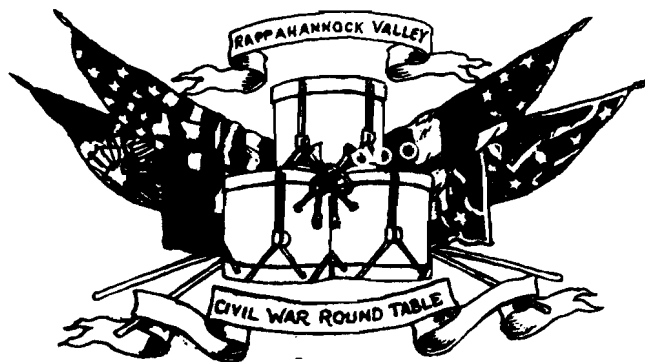


DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock
Valley Civil War Round Table



December 1996

Vol. 7 No. 12

" John Ryan -- From the Irish Brigade to Custer's 7th Cavalry "

Speaker: Sandy Barnard

When: **Monday, December 9, 1996.** Social at 6:30 p.m., dinner at 7:00 p.m., meeting at 7:45 p.m.

Location: **Holiday Inn North on Rt. 17 in Stafford near the I-95 interchange**

Dinner Cost & Reservations: The cost for dinner is \$14.00. Reservations are required and must be made by Thursday, December 5 by calling either Betty Ford at (540) 659-0128 or Mac Wyckoff at (540) 786-2470. (Please make any cancellations as soon as possible.)

In January 1862, 16-year-old Private John Ryan marched off to war with the 28th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry regiment. It would be nearly 15 years later before he would end his Army service and return to his home in West Newton, MA. During those years, he would serve under two of the more flamboyant army leaders of the period - Thomas Francis Meagher of the Irish Brigade and George Armstrong Custer of the 7th U.S. Cavalry - and fight in some of the most storied engagements in U.S. military history - Second Manassas, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Petersburg during the Civil War and the Washita and Little Big Horn during the Plains Indian wars that followed.

By the time of the Little Big Horn in June 1876, he ranked as first sergeant of Company M, 7th U.S. Cavalry. A tough, heroic soldier, he survived this final battle and went home to West Newton to join the local police force. During a 35-year second career, he again rose through the ranks to become police captain, the department's No. 2 man. Fortunately for history, Ryan wrote extensively about his military career.

Sandy Barnard, a journalist and writer of historical non-fiction for more than 25 years, specializes on the Civil War and the Plains Indians Wars that followed. His writing and research interests have become entwined with George Armstrong Custer and the men who served with him or followed him. He is the author of *I Go With Custer, The Life and Death of Reporter Mark Kellogg and Custer's First Sergeant John Ryan*. He holds degrees from Boston University and the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Currently he is an associate professor of journalism at Indiana State University.

Drum and Bugle is published monthly by the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Roundtable, P.O. Box 7632, Fredericksburg, VA 22404. Dues are \$15 per year for individuals, \$25 for families, and \$7.50 for students. Membership is open to anyone interested in the study of the Civil War and the preservation of Civil War sites. J. Dane Hartgrove (President); Mac Wyckoff (Vice President); Lou Allabut (Treasurer); Robert Williams (Newsletter Editor); Melanie Jordan (Secretary); Milt Ford (Immediate Past President); Steve Gambaro, John Graham, Elsa Lohman, Tom Quigley, Bob Roser, and Marc Thompson - Executive Committee.

November Program Reviewed by Mac Wyckoff

David Bastian addressed a large audience at the November meeting of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table on Grant's Canal at Vicksburg. In the summer of 1862 and again the following winter, Union engineers attempted to divert the Mississippi River to avoid Vicksburg. If the plan had worked, and Bastian argued that it could have, the Vicksburg Campaign would have ended much sooner. An employee of the US Army Corps of Engineers specializing in canals, Bastian is able to look at the effort to dig this waterway with a different perspective than a military historian.

In the spring of 1862, a Union fleet sailed down the Mississippi while another fleet advanced up the river toward Vicksburg. President Lincoln demanded that ships be able to follow the river unimpeded by Confederates from the upper Midwest to the Gulf of Mexico for political, military, and economic reasons. Union control of "father of all rivers" would allow Midwest farmers to send their produce to Eastern markets, divide the Confederacy, and sever important Southern transportation lines. Lincoln believed that Vicksburg was the key and final victory could not be achieved until that key was in his pocket.

Flag Officer David Farragut arrived just south of Vicksburg on May 18, 1862. Eighteen guns on the bluffs controlled passage on the river and "The Bluff City" mayor refused to surrender his fortified town. After six weeks, Farragut's fleet could not force a surrender. Realizing that the ground north of the city was too swampy for military operations, the Union officers decided that they would have to bypass the town and land troops south of the city where they could march northeast and assault the stronghold from the east.

The plan was to dig a canal across the base of DeSoto Point enticing the water to take a short-cut and the fleet could avoid the guns. Black labor from the nearby plantations cleared the land and began digging the canal across the three-quarters of a mile peninsula. The slope of the man-made waterway was greater than the natural course allowing gravity to propel the water across the peninsula rather than around it.

Bastian explained why the first try in late June and early July of 1862 failed. The Mississippi River crests in the late spring from melting snow in the upper Midwest and spring rains. Workers in the miserably hot and humid Deep South could not dig fast enough to keep up with the dropping river depth which differs up to fifty feet at Vicksburg.

In December, General Grant's attempt to move his army overland across northern Mississippi faltered when his supply line was cut and General Sherman's army failed in their attempt to storm the steep bluffs on the north edge of town after sailing down the river from Memphis. The next month, the idea of digging a canal was revived.

Ironically, with the river now rising, water in the canal impeded the laborers yet failed to erode the channel. Bad luck, poor planning, and faulty execution dogged the project. A dam was constructed on the canal and they planned to pump out the water so that the workers could enlarge the waterway, but the pump did not

work. In the confusion, not enough tools such as shovels and wheelbarrows were provided. A dredge was needed, but none arrived for several weeks. With poor sanitation, many workers became sick.

The Confederates then began to take the canal effort seriously and placed gun batteries where they commanded the lower half of the channel. After almost a year of frustration at Vicksburg, Grant became impatient. On April 16, Union gunboats and transports ran past the Confederate artillery to meet Grant's soldiers who had marched down the west bank. The men were ferried across to solid ground and they swung around so as to approach the fortified city from the east. After a lengthy siege, Vicksburg surrendered on Independence Day as General Lee's army began its retreat from Gettysburg. The key was at last in Lincoln's pocket.

As a final ironic footnote, Bastian noted that while Grant occupied the White House mother nature accomplished what Grant's soldiers could not. For twenty years, Vicksburg was not on flowing water. In the early 20th century, the Army Corps of Engineers re-routed the Yazoo River providing the water that allows for the current riverboat gambling.



Round Table Programs - Past and Future

It has been suggested that the newsletter include a list of speakers and topics we have had in the past since we have a lot of new members. What follows is a list that includes most, but not necessarily all speakers and topics.

Many of our speakers have been members of our Round Table or people from the local community. We have listened to Karen Rehm, Juanita Leisch, Jeff Driscoll, Marc Thompson, Thomas Moncure, Jr., Elsa Lohman, Betty Ford, Milton Ford, Julie Olsen, Melanie Jordan, Susan Hartgrove, Dane Hartgrove, Janice Frye, Bob Krick, Bobby Krick, Will Greene, Frank O'Reilly, Greg Mertz, Mike Balis, Mark Stephens, Noel Harrison, Ray Brown, Pete Carmichael, Mike Litterst, Dennis Frye, Grant Gates, Joe Fulginiti, Don Pfanz, Mac Wyckoff, Jim Chalker, Homer Musselman, and Dr. Campbell. From a little further away we have brought in Dot Kelly, Joe Harsh, Mark Snell, Howard Coffin, Mike Musick, Gary Gallagher, Keith Snyder, Al Harris, Greg Biggs, Jack Thompson, Paul Sledzyk, William Marvel, Scott Patchen, William Sill, Gordon Rhea, William Matter, Bud Hall, Mike Andrus, Dave Ruth, and William Tidwell.

Most of the programs have dealt with military campaigns. We have increased our knowledge of Dam No. 1 at Yorktown, Jackson's Valley Campaign, Seven Days Campaign, 2nd Manassas, Antietam, Salem Church, Brandy Station, Falling Waters, Pickett's Charge, East Cavalry Fight at Gettysburg, Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Yellow Tavern, North Anna, Petersburg, Fort Harrison, Piedmont, Retreat to Appomattox, Shiloh, Pea Ridge, East Tennessee Campaign, Atlanta Campaign, Franklin, and Siege of Charleston.

Several speeches have focused on individuals. We have learned about Richard Kirkland, William Buel Franklin, Ambrose E. Burnside, Willie Pegram, "Stonewall" Jackson, George Meade, Richard Ewell, George Pickett, James Longstreet and the provost marshalls Marsena Patrick and John H. Winder.

We have also had programs on Death Rates Among Black Soldiers, Common Soldiers in the Army of the Potomac, Vermonters and the Civil War, The Impact of War on the Fredericksburg Civilians, Kershaw's Brigade in the Maryland Campaign, Women in the War Parts 1-3, Battle Flags of the Confederacy, The C and O Canal in the Civil War, Civil War Prints, Men of the 54th Massachusetts, Put the War Back into the Civil War, Mosby's Impact on Sheridan, Civil War Veterans who gave us Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, The 47th Virginia, Lucius O.C. Lamar and Confederate Foreign Relations, Underwater Archeology of The Alabama, Confederate Covert Action in the Civil War, A Comparison of Civil War Arms, The Style of Women's Clothing During the Civil War, How to do Research at the National Archives, and The Collection of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.

We have had a debate on the generalship of George McClellan and have discussed Burnside's options at Fredericksburg, Mosby's impact on the war in Virginia, what might have happened if Jackson had been at Gettysburg, the war's most overrated and underrated battles, and our favorite and most overrated generals.

We have gone on field trips to Cedar Creek, Brandy Station, Seven Days, 2nd Manassas, Antietam, North Anna, and Gettysburg.

Tour leaders have been Joseph Whitehorne, Bud Hall, Bobby Krick, John Hennessy, John Powell, Mike Miller, Scott Hartwig, Eric Campbell, Karlton Smith, and Tom Holbrook.

We have also had evening walks of Prospect Hill, Bernard Cabins and Marye's Heights at Fredericksburg. We've hiked Lee's Last Line, Laurel Hill, Harris Farm, and Upton attack at Spotsylvania. At Chancellorsville we've toured the areas around Catharine Furnace, Jackson's wounding site, Hazel Grove to Fairview, and the May 3 battlefield between the Chancellorsville Visitor Center and the Chancellorsville Inn. At Wilderness we've walked Gordon's Flank Attack Trail, the Tapp Field, and toured Ellwood. We've also had a candlelight tour of the Jackson Shrine. Most of the walks have been lead by Frank O'Reilly, Greg Mertz, and Mac Wyckoff. Other leaders have been Elsa Lohman, Ian Lowe, Keith Bohannon, Tom Quigley, Glen Swain, Ron Seagrave, and Mark Stephens.

Although many topics have been covered and battlefields toured, many important gaps still exist and continuing research provides new information and fresh interpretations. The Executive Committee will continue to bring high quality programs on a variety of Civil War related topics.

1997 Programs

- January 13 Dane Hartgrove - Two Great Rebel Nations: A Comparative Study of the Struggles for Independence of the USA and CSA.
- February 10 Steve Gambaro - Indians in the Civil War.
- March 10 Jeannie Christy - Women at City Point.
- March 22 Annual Preservation Conference with tour of 2nd Fredericksburg and Salem Church led by Ray Brown and Frank O'Reilly.
- March 22 Annual Preservation Conference Banquet. Noel Harrison speaking on Little Known Sites Related to 2nd Fredericksburg & Salem Church.
- March 23 Annual Preservation Conference with tour of Spotsylvania led by Mac Wyckoff and Greg Mertz.
- April 14 Mark Bradley - The Battle of Bentonville.
- May 12 Pete Carmichael - The Marriage of Richard S. Ewell to Lizinka Campbell Brown.
- June 9 Daniel Barefoot - General Robert F. Hoke
- June 14 Walking tour of the Union opening moves at Chancellorsville led by Mac Wyckoff.
- July 12 Walking tour of the Confederate response to Hooker's opening moves by Mac Wyckoff.
- July 14 Ed Sanders - Battle of Haw's Shop
- August 11 Frank O'Reilly - Battle of Trevilian Station
- September 8 Ed Bearss - Grant's Generalship at Cold Harbor
- October 13 Discussion of McClellan's Peninsula Campaign & Grant's Overland Campaign
- October 18 Field Trip to Cold Harbor led by Mike Andrus
- November 10 Bob Housch - Battle of Chickamauga
- December 8 Greg Biggs - Battle of Brice's Cross Roads

**5th Annual Statewide Conference on
Preserving Virginia's Civil War Battlefields**

For the fifth year the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Roundtable is hosting a two-day conference on preserving Virginia's Civil War battlefields. The dates for the conference are March 22-23, 1997. This year the group will focus on sites dealing with the Chancellorsville and Spotsylvania campaigns. The conference consists of two days of bus tours led by well-known Civil War historians. Saturday's tour will cover sites related to the fighting around Salem Church and the second battle of Fredericksburg (both of which took place during the Chancellorsville campaign). The tour will be led by historians Ray Brown and Frank O'Reilly. There will be a banquet Saturday evening at the Holiday Inn North, with a social hour at 6:00 pm and dinner at 7:00 pm, followed by Noel Harrison's talk on "Fredericksburg, Then and Now". We will also hold a print raffle that evening, with proceeds going to a preservation group for the specific purpose of assisting in the purchase and protection of threatened sites. Sunday's tour will cover the Spotsylvania campaign of May 1864. Historians Gregory Mertz and Mac Wyckoff will lead the day's tour. In addition to covering the battles, the tours will also focus on important preservation issues affecting these sites, and what we, as concerned citizens, can do to protect endangered sites.

The tours will begin at 8:00 am and last until 5:00 pm. We will meet the buses at the Rt. 17 North commuter parking lot. Lunch will be provided by the Roundtable. The conference is open to the first 90 participants, with priority being given to those people who register for the full package. The Roundtable will be getting information and brochures out in early January 1997. If you would like further information, please contact either Tom Quigley at (540) 786-0530 or Mac Wyckoff at (540) 786-2470.

The Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center Needs Help!

--If you have an interest in the Civil War...

--If you would enjoy **sharing your knowledge** with visitors to Fredericksburg...

--If you are available to **donate 8 hours on a weekday**...

Then **YOU** might be just what the **National Park Service** is looking for!

The staff at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park includes a very active volunteer program. At present, the park has vacancies at the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center for three weekdays. The positions call for volunteers who would like to staff the information desk--greeting visitors and providing a park brochure, telling about park programs, answering questions about the Civil War and area services, and some of the veteran volunteers help visitors with research and conduct walking tours.

What are the steps in the application and training for these positions?

--Call Greg Mertz, the park's Supervisory Historian at (540) 373-6124, to obtain an application and conduct an interview

--Attend a five-hour orientation and information duty training session with other potential volunteers

--Read a 55-page booklet on the Battle of Fredericksburg written by William Marvel to brush-up on events of the battle (available for loan)

--Take the Battle of Fredericksburg tape tour, lasting about three hours (available by loan)

--Attend on-the-job training at the visitor center with Elsa Lohman, Fredericksburg Battlefield Historian and site supervisor (whom many of you know as one of the RVCWRT board members and the person who conducts the book raffle at our meetings)

Positions involve working either one day each week, or one day every other week. Other volunteer positions are available. At present, staffing the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center is the top priority. We hope to fill all of the positions by the spring, otherwise visitation will be too high for the paid staff alone to accommodate visitor needs.

If you would be interested in assisting visitors to appreciate the special area in which we live, consider becoming a park volunteer.

In Memory of Bill Whitesell

William Bolling Whitesell died on Friday, November 1, 1996 at the age of 79. He succumbed to pneumonia at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC after about three weeks of hospitalization. His body was laid to rest Monday, November 4, after a grave-side funeral with full military honors in Quantico National Cemetery.

Bill could be found virtually every Friday volunteering at the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center information desk since 1991. During some years, he did not miss a single day, and at least once he had accumulated more volunteer hours in a year than any other member of our large Volunteers In Parks program. In addition to helping visitors, he also did a variety of jobs for the park and park staff in a metalworking or machine shop at his home. Bill made a special screwdriver tip so the screws in the park's exhibit cases would be unique and could not be removed with any standard screwdrivers. This anti-tampering step helped to make the irreplaceable artifacts in the cases more secure.

Bill was a New Years Day baby, arriving in 1917. While born in Roanoke, his family moved when he was quite young to Pulaski, where his father managed a Coca-cola bottling plant. Bill graduated from Pulaski High School, and then apparently took his first step toward what would result in a life-long connection with the military by attending Fork Union Military Academy for a year. He then attended Virginian Polytechnic Institute, graduating with a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering in 1940.

When the United States entered into World War II, Bill joined the army, applying his degree through service with the Army Corps of Engineers. Bill's tours of duty took him to both the Pacific and European Theaters of the war. In April, 1943 Bill completed officer candidate school at Fort Belvoir and received a commission.

After the war, Bill returned to his alma mater as a teacher rather than a student, being appointed an Assistant Professor of Military Science. He was recalled to active duty with the outbreak of the Korean War. This time when the hostilities ended, Bill decided not to go back to civilian life but to make military service his career. After retiring from the military, he continued to work in a civilian capacity at the U.S. Army Engineer School at Fort Belvoir for another fifteen years, retiring for good in 1980.

The following year, he settled in Fredericksburg. After attending a meeting of the Fredericksburg Civil War Round Table, Bill responded to a call for park volunteers. At the time the park staff got to know Bill, his wife, Florence Nash Whitesell, had already passed away. Bill and Florence had no children, but they had family in northern Virginia, and he showed some of his relatives around the visitor center and the battlefields when they came down to visit. Bill was quite attentive to caring for his wife's dog, going home each day to walk the dog over his lunch break. Bill attended many of the park functions and also joined the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table.

Bill Whitesell served his country through a military career, made many contributions to the Civil War community in his retirement, and was a friend to many. He will be missed.

Founded in 1989, the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table (RVCWRT) is open to anyone interested in the study of the Civil War and the preservation of Civil War battlefields. Dues are \$15 per year for individuals, \$25 for families, and \$7.50 for students.

Meetings are normally held on the second Monday of each month, beginning with a social time at 6:30 p.m., dinner at 7:00, and business meeting at 7:45. A lecture on a Civil War topic usually begins around 8:00 p.m., and is open to the public. The evening concludes with our book raffle, for which the speaker draws the winning ticket. As a change from the lecture format, our October meetings feature open discussion of a controversial Civil War topic. The round table currently meets in a Fredericksburg area restaurant.

RVCWRT hosts an annual conference on preserving Virginia's Civil War heritage in late March, the profits from which are donated for the purchase of battlefield land. On the second Saturday evening in June and July, we hold walking tours of sites on local battlefields. Members gather for an annual picnic on a Sunday afternoon in August. Each year the round table hosts a guided field trip to a Civil War site; in past years we have

visited the Brandy Station, Cedar Creek, Seven Days, Second Manassas, Antietam (Sharpsburg), and North Anna battlefields. The round table is responsible for maintenance of an original artillery position at Aquia Landing in Stafford County in conjunction with Patawomeck Band Memorial Park.

Members receive a monthly newsletter that announces the next meeting's speaker and lecture topic, provides a recapitulation of the previous month's lecture, contains dues notices and warnings of schedule changes, discusses preservation issues, and provides a schedule of upcoming programs, lectures, tours, and seminars. Members are invited to submit book reviews and articles on topics of interest to the newsletter editor.

RVCWRT encourages its members to become active in round table affairs. Election of officers and members of the Executive Committee takes place at the January meeting; nominations can be made from the floor, and willing workers are always welcome. We believe that learning best takes place in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere in which we are united in the study of that great conflict which temporarily divided our nation, and in the determination to preserve the hallowed ground on which the soldiers fought.

RVCWRT Membership Registration Form

Name _____

Address _____

Phone (Home) _____ (Work) _____

Fax no./e-mail address _____

Annual dues are \$15 for individuals, \$25 for families and \$7.50 for students. Please make your check payable to RVCWRT in the appropriate amount and mail it with your registration form to:

Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
P. O. Box 7632
Fredericksburg, VA 22404

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