



RICHMOND CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

January 2021

“The Civil War is the crux of our history. You cannot understand any part of our past, from the convening of the Constitutional Convention, down to this morning, without eventually arriving at the Civil War.”

Bernard de Voto

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January 12, 2021

7:30 p.m.

**“The Battle of New Market Heights”
by Jimmy Price**

**Please note: This will be a Zoom meeting!
For instructions on how to download the
free Zoom App, the meeting number and
pass code please see page 3.**



In the predawn darkness of September 29, 1864, black Union soldiers attacked a heavily fortified position on the outskirts of Richmond known as New Market Heights. In a few short hours of desperate fighting these soldiers struck a blow against experienced troops of Robert E. Lee’s vaunted Army of Northern Virginia and proved to their detractors that they could fight for freedom and citizenship for

themselves and their enslaved brethren. Fourteen of the black soldiers who stormed New Market Heights that day would be awarded the nation's highest honor – the Medal of Honor. Jimmy Price, author of *The Battle of New Market Heights: Freedom Will Be Theirs by the Sword*, which the *Journal of Southern History* claims “offers considerable insight regarding the black military experience,” will present a talk on this often overlooked 1864 battle and its important legacy in military history.

Jimmy Price is an Education Specialist with the National Cemetery Administration's Veterans Legacy Program and founding board member of the Battle of New Market Heights Memorial and Education Association. He received his M.A. in Military History from Norwich University in 2009. His first book, *The Battle of New Market Heights: Freedom Will Be Theirs by the Sword*, was nominated in the nonfiction category for the 15th annual Library of Virginia Literary Awards. His second book, *The Battle of First Deep Bottom*, was released to critical acclaim in 2014. Jimmy writes about different aspects of the Civil War on his blog, *Freedom by the Sword: A Historian's Journey Through the American Civil War Era* and has contributed essays to *A Companion to the Meuse-Argonne Campaign* (edited by Dr. Edward G. Lengel), *Hallowed Ground* magazine, and the *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*. He lives in Fredericksburg with his wife and four children.

A Word From Our President

I would like for all of us to take a moment and remember our friend Gary Cowardin. Gary was a loyal and very involved member of the round table of many

years and all of us will feel his loss for a long time.

Ulli Baumann has stepped up and offered to produce the newsletter. We are, however, looking for a person to take over as webmaster. If you are interested, please let any of the Board members know. Ulli has also lined up an excellent list of speakers for this year. Unfortunately, until the virus subsides and the church allows groups to use their building, we will not be able to meet in person. We have decided to use Zoom to hold meetings during the interim, and our speakers have graciously offered to hold their talks in this way. Andy Keller has made the arrangements and will be hosting the meetings. In this newsletter, Andy has included instructions as to how you can access our meetings, which will be held on our normal schedule.

At the beginning of the January meeting the membership will vote on a few items. The leadership team has suggested that the current slate of officers stay in place during 2021. Additionally, it has been proposed that we will not collect dues this year from current members. The round table has a good amount of money in reserve and can handle it. We were unable to hold meetings after Gary Gallagher's excellent talk in March and can't offer in person meetings at this time, so it seems like the right thing to do.

Also up for a vote will be the round table's donation of \$500 in Gary's memory to the Battlefield Trust, designated to the Gaines' Mill/Cold Harbor acquisition by the Trust.

Let's all do the best we can during these trying times. Relief is on the way, so let's make the best of it and enjoy our speakers. Please take care of yourselves and we hope to see you all again soon.

Doug Crenshaw

ZOOM SIGN ON INFORMATION FOR MEETING

By Andy Keller

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83471506220?pwd=Sy9jYlZDenVabTVld1d0WTE1UHNnUT09>

Or <https://tinyurl.com/RCWRT2021>

For Audio only call +1 301 715 8592. Long Distance Rates may apply

Meeting ID: 834 7150 6220

Passcode: 481366

To participate in a Zoom session, your computer will need a camera function, standard for most laptops, Smart Phones and tablets. I would suggest reviewing the camera function before that time. We recommend that you join 5 - 10 minutes before the meeting starts, to be sure that your equipment is working and review some of the features. You will be unmuted on admittance during that time for socializing, but you should mute yourself when requested. We hope to record the meeting so if you are unable to attend please send a request for the recording to Secretary.RCWRT@gmail.com.

We do realize that not all members will be able to view the program, but also feel that this approach is better than entirely missing more meetings. Before the program, there will be the election of officers, a vote on a recommendation that no dues be assessed for 2021, and a donation to the Battlefield Trust in Gary Cowardin's memory.

In Memoriam

by Jack Mountcastle

We recall with great fondness our dedicated, enthusiastic member, Gary Cowardin, who passed away on December 11 after suffering a stroke. Active in the Richmond Civil War Round Table for over 20 years, Gary assumed the demanding duties of webmaster and newsletter editor in 2009. In these key posts, he introduced our organization to 21st Century communications. As you know, we could always depend upon Gary's exceptional talent in providing our speakers with professional audiovisual support that truly enhanced these presentations. His superb photographs of major round table activities – our annual dinner and summer field trip – helped all of us appreciate the excitement and enjoyment of those events.

Never one to seek credit for all that he did for us, he personified the concept of selfless service to his country, his family, and his community. Gary had a life-long interest in history, was a graduate of John Marshall High School in Richmond, studied at Richmond Professional Institute (VCU) and worked for more than 30 years for Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Company (Verizon). When his nation called, Gary answered, serving in the United States Marine Corps. This veteran of combat in Vietnam was not only tireless in his support of the round table, but of the Richmond Chapter of the Marine Corps League and the Longstreet Camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Gary's life-long interest in all aspects of communications technology, his skill as a photographer, and his boundless energy enabled him to establish a major communications network and then manage the complex system for many years in support of the very popular "Field Day of the

Past” events that took place in Manakin-Sabot each fall. Through it all, Gary maintained his contacts with his boyhood friends and his classmates from John Marshall and enjoyed meeting with them whenever possible.

We hope that you will keep his wife, Nancy Parker, in your thoughts and prayers during this most difficult period for her and for Gary’s extended family.



Upcoming Meetings

(Until further notice, all meetings will be via Zoom)

February 9: Gene Schmiel, “Lincoln, Antietam and a Northern Lost Cause”

March 9: Dr. Peter Carmichael, “The War for the Common Soldier”

April 13: Hampton Newsome, “The Fight for the Old North State”

May 11: Jim Hessler, “Gettysburg’s Peach Orchard: Longstreet, Sickles, and the Bloody Fight for the ‘Commanding Ground’ along the Emmitsburg Road”

June 8: Nathan Hall, “The Spies of Richmond”

July 13: Jim Gindlesperger, “Fire on the Water: The USS Kearsarge and the CSS Alabama”

August 10: Dr. Charles Fennell, “The Battle of Culp’s Hill on July 3, 1863”

September 14: Douglas Waller, “Lincoln’s Spies: Their Secret War to Save a Nation”

October 12: Victor Vignola, “The May 31, 1862 Battle of Fair Oaks: The Struggle for the Adams House, Bull Sumner’s Glory Day”

November 9 (tentative dinner meeting): Janet Croon, “The War Outside my Window: The Civil War Diary of LeRoy Wiley Gresham 1860-1865”

December 14: Scott Mingus, “The Battle of Second Winchester: The Confederate Victory that Opened the Door to Gettysburg”

Please note: Savas Beatie has offered a discount on any books presented by their published authors. There are three on our schedule this year: Jim Hessler, Janet Croon, and Scott Mingus. Savas Beatie has also expressed an interest in publishing Vic Vignola’s book (October speaker).

Major Preservation Victory

By Bert Dunkerly

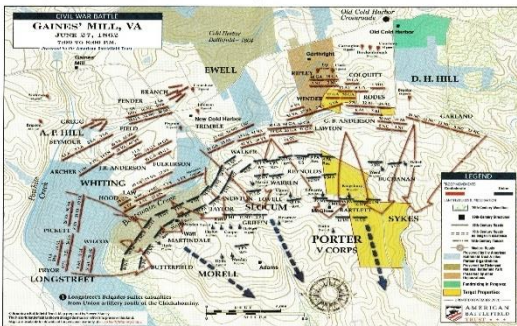
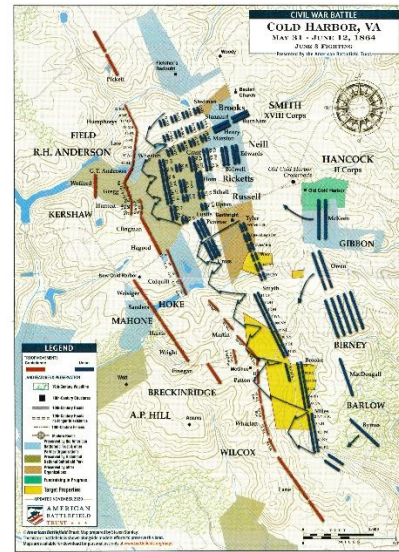
Many of our members also support the American Battlefield Trust and are familiar with this news. On December 14, the Trust announced a major preservation achievement at Gaines’ Mill and Cold Harbor.

Fought two years apart, the battles overlap along the land that borders Route 156, south of the Cold Harbor Crossroads (and south and east of the current National Park property). For decades historians and park staff have identified this land as some of the most important to preserve should the opportunity ever arise. Some of our members may recall that park staff had permission to lead special ‘real time’ tours here during the 150th Anniversary in 2014. The Trust has reached an agreement with

the landowner to put the area under easement, protecting it from development.

This area was the Union army's right flank during the June 27, 1862 Battle of Gaines' Mill, and here Stonewall Jackson's troops drove back the Union defenders. The same ground witnessed some of the heaviest fighting on June 3, 1864 during the Battle of Cold Harbor. In fact, the only Union success that day occurred here. Federal troops even started digging a tunnel, as they would later at Petersburg.

The importance of the Trust's achievement cannot be overstated. Development is springing up all around



Richmond National Battlefield's sites, within the last year Glendale and Rural Plains have become nearly encircled. This is core battlefield land that saw heavy fighting in two major engagements.

I compare it to not having the Sunken Road at Antietam or not having Devil's Den or Little Round Top at Gettysburg. These areas are crucial to understanding the larger battles.

Those wishing to support the effort can visit www.battlefields.org.

Which Books would you Recommend?

By Dan Balfour

Having been a round table member since the 1950s as a teenager in Franklin (where Waite Rawls also was a member), I have over the years been asked which books to read to nurture an interest in the "War?" I usually suggest two or three, all but one fairly old, but I think good.

The first is "The Story of the Confederacy" by Robert Selph Henry, published in 1936. Henry wrote a good, straight forward and unbiased 'story.' As some know, he also wrote a biography of General Forrest.

The second is Michael Shaara's "Killer Angels." This is for the person who thinks that history is boring or dry. As is often the case, the movie "Gettysburg," though good, fails to do the book justice.

If the questioner wants a good biography as a starter and likes action, I suggest "J.E.B. Stuart" by retired Marine

Captain John Thomason, written in the late 20s. Thomason drew his own good illustrations and is an enthusiastic, colorful writer. Though accurate, there are no footnotes, it is just a good read. (Thomason and I do disagree about who led Stuart's charge into Hanover, PA on June 30, 1863. As author of the 13th VA regimental, the 13th, not the 2nd NC, led the charge.)

Now.... Which books would you recommend?

More Book Recommendations

By Danny Witt

With so many of our favorite places and events shut down or having limited activities, I spent the spring and summer doing two of my favorite things safely and with very limited contact with people. I visited Civil War sites and did a lot of (guilt free) reading. So I wanted to share a few books I have enjoyed with you.

The book I used for touring is "Civil War Sites in Virginia" by James I. Robertson, Jr. and Brian Steel Wills. The thing I like about this book is it has a few of the big sites and major battlefields we have all toured, but it is mostly small sites that you don't know about or would never find, from out of the way museums to roadside signs that mark a site. It also includes whole towns or places like the Cumberland Gap. The only thing to keep in mind is the book was published in 2011, so signs have been moved or taken down because the road was rerouted or in a few cases the directions are just too vague. I have spent the last four years since I came across the book trying to visit everything in the book and currently I am at about 90%, having added a lot this year.

The first really good book I came across this summer was "The Cornfield" by

David A. Welker. I enjoyed this because it gave an hour by hour account of that one aspect of that terrible day in U.S. history. If you have read any of my book reviews in the past you know how important good and plentiful maps are to me and this book meets both standards. A really good read.

Book three is "Gettysburg's Peach Orchard" by James A. Hessler and Britt C. Isenberg. Good read and maps just as the previous book, just a different battlefield. In case you missed it, James Hessler is scheduled to talk to the round table about this very book next May. I can't wait!

All of the above books are available at Barnes and Noble and Amazon. Read, stay safe and I look forward to seeing everyone ASAP.

For future newsletters we welcome your articles, such as book reviews, battlefield visits, your favorite Civil War personality, or your Civil War ancestor.

ullib1101@gmail.com

Quotable Quotes

One of the best:

"I have just read your dispatch about sore tongued and fatigued horses. Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigued anything?"

Abraham Lincoln to George McClellan

**This newsletter is respectfully
dedicated to the memory of**

Gary Cowardin

