



Founded at Fort Harrison
on February 8, 1951

RICHMOND CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

DECEMBER 2024

“The Civil War was the biggest thing that ever happened to us. It was our Iliad and our Odyssey – and it remains our least understood war.”

Bruce Catton

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**DECEMBER 10, 2024
7:30 p.m.**

**At First Presbyterian Church
4602 Cary Street Road
Richmond, VA 23226**
(The parking lot is behind the church; go up the
steps to fellowship hall on the left)

SARAH KAY BIERLE

**“John Pelham: Trained at West
Point but Aiming Artillery for the
Confederacy”**



What was it like to be a cadet at West Point for five years immediately prior to the Civil War? How did one of the last cadets to resign and head south justify his actions in his own mind? Did his West Point training influence his role as commander of the Stuart Horse Artillery from 1861 to 1863, including his artillery duels at Antietam?



John Pelham

This program uses primary sources to examine the difficult decisions facing a young Alabamian in the years before and during America's costliest and bitterest conflict.

Whether we agree or not with Pelham's conclusions, understanding the context of his decisions and the formation of his leadership is key to exploring his battlefield tactics, motivations, and military innovations.

Sarah Kay Bierle graduated from Thomas Edison State University with a BA in History, works in the Education Department at American Battlefield Trust, and occasionally writes for *Emerging Civil War*. She has spent years exploring ways to share quality historical research in ways that will inform and inspire modern audiences, including school presentations, writing, battlefield tours, and speaking engagements. She has published five books. Her forthcoming books in 2025 are a biography of John Pelham published by Savas Beatie and a book about military

decisions at Chancellorsville with the University of Tennessee Press.

Sarah will bring her books to sell and sign.

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

WHY? OH WHY?

Why do so many people still read so many books about the Civil War? There is no definitive count of how many Civil War books have been written, but most estimates are close to 80,000. Damn. That's a lot. Appomattox was less than 60,000 days ago, so that's more than a book a day every day since April 1865. And the demand continues to be high for more. Why? The new supply is tending to be more about politics and economics and popular culture but look at the interest in Liz Varon's new book on Longstreet. And look at books on smaller or more obscure topics like the role of children who wore blue and gray or microhistories (my favorite is *Nothing But Glory* by Kathy Georg. It is over 300 pages long and deals with nothing but George Pickett's Division for the hour between 3:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. on July 3, 1863.).

Why do so many people love to tromp around on battlefields? Each year sees several million visits to battlefields. Although visits to Gettysburg and Antietam, the biggest two destinations, are down somewhat, look at the number of battlefields that are newly preserved and opened to the public. Or look at the expansion of preserved battlefield land that draws return visits. Or look at the new interest in battlefields from the Revolutionary War or the War of 1812. In last month's newsletter, I addressed the

tremendous increase in preserved battlefield land. We should note that the increase is not only measured with additional acreage at the big sites but also at dozens of smaller battlefields that are now being preserved. The new central Virginia park system around Culpeper is a great example of smaller sites which have been preserved and opened to the public.

Why do so many people love to attend lectures and symposia? And, increasingly, so many people are following social media about the war. Look at the explosion of content on the American Battlefield Trust website, with videos, talking heads, interpretive maps, and the works. Only twenty years ago, I was on the board of the then Civil War Preservation Trust and would argue with Jim Lightizer about our mission. He would say (with a bit of a smile on his face), “we are here to buy dirt.” And I would say, “but we need to tell people what happened on that dirt and why it matters.” Think of the signage on the battlefields today. Two generations ago, the “Freeman Markers” were all we had. Now the Civil War Trails program gets awards for being one of the best public education projects ever done.

Why do so many people have the hobby, no, the passion of collecting Civil War artifacts. From guns to swords to uniforms to hats to belt buckles. There is an avid market for these items and the prices seem outrageously high to those who have not been bitten by the bug. The shows and the auctions attract thousands who drive hundreds of miles just to see what is being offered for sale.

Why so some people love to put on reproductions of authentic uniforms and carry similar reproductions of belts,

canteens, boots, and weapons. I will never forget, at the old Museum of the Confederacy, meeting with ten Confederate reenactors from Stuttgart, Germany. Their biggest concern was finding people who wanted to reenact the Yankees!! Why in Germany? Why the preference for the Johnny Rebs? Or the Confederados (descendants of Confederates living in Brazil) putting on uniforms and hoop skirts and having a good old Virginia Reel to a band playing Civil War tunes. Or the folks in Ballarat, Australia who do the same thing to commemorate the wartime visit of the *CSS Shenandoah*. Brazil? Australia? Come on. Really?

For the past two decades, I have been in the position where people ask me the questions posed above. Why all this fascination? What is this bug that bites people and turns them into Civil War buffs? I am afraid that, if I answered them honestly, I would say. “I’ll be damned if I know.” But I fake it and give them some made-up answer which is seemingly plausible. Do you do the same when friends and neighbors ask you why?

This is my last President’s message for the newsletter. I leave the responsibility now to Billie Raines, and I know it will be in good hands. I also know that I have enjoyed writing these monthly musings.

Waite

ANNUAL ELECTIONS

Director ballots will be handed out as you enter the church at the top of the steps. The completed ballots will be placed in a box at that same location. If you take your ballot into the meeting room to think about it, please return it to the ballot box before the meeting begins.

Vote for up to three past presidents to serve as directors for the following year. All other offices, except for the Past President, will be handled by a voice vote before the speaker is introduced. The membership will also vote on the dues level for 2025. Do not write your check until after the membership has approved the dues level.

ANNUAL DUES NOTICE

Dues will soon be due and should be paid to the Secretary by February 15, 2025. The Executive Board has recommended the following dues levels for next year: Individual dues \$35, and Couples \$45.

You may pay your dues in person to Andy at the meeting or send a check – made out to Richmond CWRT – to Andy Keller, 9701 Fireside Drive, Glen Allen, VA 23060. As an added convenience you may also pay your dues via Venmo this year. Leroy-Keller-3 is the User Name.

Please note: Since the January and February meetings are via Zoom and if you had planned to pay Andy at one of those meetings, you may do so at the March meeting without penalty.

FAIR OAKS TOUR RESCHEDULED

The recently announced tour of Fair Oaks on November 23 by the author of “Contrasts in Command,” Vic Vignola, has been rescheduled to Spring 2025.

We will announce the new date in the newsletter as soon as it is available.

SILENT AUCTION AT DECEMBER MEETING

Due to a generous donation two items will be offered at our December meeting – just in time for holiday gift giving. So, bring cash or your checkbook.

“The Gray Comanches – Battle of Brandy Station” – framed and signed print by Don Troiani (31”x36”)



150th Anniversary Stamp and Envelope Commemorative (12”x14” framed): Grant-Lee Appomattox Court House and Davis-Johnston Bennett Place Station



OCTOBER FIELD TRIP

On October 26, 22 members of the Richmond CWRT went on a fantastic field trip to Fort Monroe and Lee Hall Mansion. We had great tour guides at both sites and the weather could not have been more perfect. Thank you, Dale, for organizing this most informative and great trip!



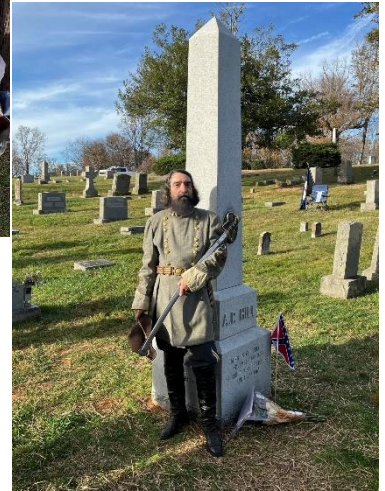
RCWRT Represented at A.P. Hill Grave Marker Dedication

RCWRT members Art and Diane Wingo, Lynette Alley, Marilyn Jones, Donald Currin, and Billie Raines attended the A.P. Hill Grave Marker Dedication on November 9th at Fairview Cemetery, Culpeper, Virginia.

The event, sponsored by the A.P. Hill Memorial Association, featured music by Virginia Dare, rifle and cannon volleys, and keynote speaker, Patrick Falci, portraying

A.P. Hill, spoke on the four burials of General Hill. Descendants of General Hill unveiled the stunning obelisk marking his grave to the cheers of the crowd. It was most fitting that

the dedication took place on General Hill's 199th birthday.



EVENT OF INTEREST – save the date

The Petersburg Battlefields Foundation will present A Symposium and Annual Meeting in celebration of their 10th Anniversary. It will take place on Saturday, March 8, 2025, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Petersburg's Historic Union Station.

The theme of the Symposium is "Why Did War Come To Petersburg" and will feature five presentations covering topics of Revolutionary War Petersburg; Petersburg as a center of supply, industry, and transportation; the defense of Petersburg during the Civil War; and unique relics from the collection of the Petersburg National Battlefield and local historians.

More information at www.PETEBATTLEFIELDS.ORG.

ANNUAL DINNER MEETING

On November 12, forty members and guests enjoyed good food, companionship and a great talk by



Robert Hancock at our annual dinner meeting at Willow Oaks Country Club. Robert spoke about "The Slaughters of Lynchburg" and their very interesting story.



Life Members of the RCWRT: (from left) Ulli Baumann, Jack Mountcastle, Sandy Parker (missing: Dan Balfour)

FORT HARRISON EVENT

To commemorate the first documented Black soldier vote on November 8, 1864, when the 5th United States Colored Troops of Ohio casted 194 votes in the election, an event was presented by Richmond National Battlefield Park at Fort Harrison.



Our own Waite Rawls and Art Wingo, both volunteers at the Park, greeted visitors at the Park's information table.

**A WARM WELCOME TO OUR
NEW MEMBER:
RICHARD LEWIS**

2025 MEETING SCHEDULE

January 14:* Megan Kate Nelson, "The Three-Cornered War: The Union, The Confederacy, and Native Peoples in the Fight for the West"

February 11:* Keven Walker, "Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation"

March 11: Steve Longenecker, "Pulpits of the Lost Cause: The Faith and Politics of Former Confederate Chaplains During Reconstruction"

April 8: Phil Stone, "Lincoln's Virginia Family"

May 13: Joe Stahl and Matt Borders, "Faces of Union Soldiers at Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Culp's Hill"

June 10: Clayton Butler, "True Blue: White Unionists in the Deep South During the Civil War and Reconstruction"

July 8: Barton Myers, "Lincoln's Commanders from the Old Dominion"

August 12: Peter Luebke, "Death Loves a Shining Mark: St. Joseph Tucker Randolph's Civil War"

September 9: Dr. Lesley Gordon, "Cowardice and Combat in the Civil War"

October 14: Mike Gorman, "What's New in Civil War Richmond History"

November 11 (annual dinner meeting): Jonathan White, "Shipwrecked: A True Civil War Story of Mutinies, Jailbreaks, Blockade-Running, and the Slave Trade"

December 9: Dr. Elizabeth Varon, topic to be determined

*** January and February speakers will be via Zoom**

Attendance at November Dinner: 40