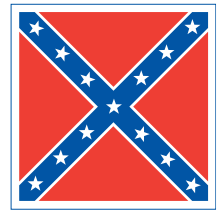


# THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Founded December 3, 1940



Volume LXVIII, Number 4

Chicago, Illinois

December, 2007



## 666th REGULAR MEETING

GORDON RHEA

ON

“CHARLES WHILDEN AND THE WILDERNESS”

★★★★★

Friday, December 14

★★★★★

HOLIDAY INN MART PLAZA  
350 NORTH ORLEANS STREET

*Cocktails at 5:30 p.m.*

*Dinner at 6:30 p.m.*

**\$35 - Members/Non-members**

*Entrée:*

*Prime Rib of Beef, Catch of the Day, Vegetarian Plate or Fruit Plate*

### PLEASE NOTE

Make your reservation by **MONDAY, Dec. 10** by calling **630-460-1865**. Reservations can also be made by emailing [chicagocwrt-dinner@earthlink.net](mailto:chicagocwrt-dinner@earthlink.net) with the names of your party and their choice of entree. Reservations made after Wednesday, Dec. 12, will be surcharged \$5.

People who attend without having made a reservation will pay a \$5 walk-in charge. If a cancellation becomes necessary after dinner reservations have been made, please call the number before 9 a.m. Thursday to avoid a charge.

We are offering the option of choosing not to have dinner and coming only for the address at 7:30 p.m., for a charge of \$5 per person.

*Parking at the Holiday Inn is \$10 with a validated parking sticker.*

## Gordon Rhea on Charles Whilden and the Wilderness

BY BRUCE ALLARDICE

An aging, epileptic clerk from Charleston, South Carolina, Charles Whilden was one of those ordinary Americans whose lives seemed destined to be remembered only by his family and friends. A good education did not lead to any success in his numerous prewar business ventures, and his age and ill-health kept him out of the Confederate army until late in the war. Yet in his few week's combat service this unlikely hero seized a battleflag and, with astonishing bravery, led a crucial charge that helped Lee's army win a battle.

Utilizing Whilden's many letters home, and deep knowledge of primary sources, Gordon Rhea weaves Whilden's remarkable life story, and unlikely heroism, into the larger story of the *Wilderness Campaign*. In that campaign Robert E. Lee's army faced disaster several times, and each time was rescued by the extraordinary efforts of seemingly un-extraordinary men such as Private Charles Whilden.



Gordon Rhea

Born in Arlington, Virginia, Gordon Rhea earned his undergraduate degree (cum laude) from Indiana University, an M. A in history from Harvard, and his law degree from Stanford. Mr. Rhea currently practices law in Charleston, South Carolina. He is most noted for his award-winning four volumes on the Overland Campaign of 1864, all published by LSU Press: The Battle of the Wilderness, May 5-6, 1864; The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern, May 7-12, 1864; To the North Anna River: Grant and Lee, May 13-25, 1864; and Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee, May 26-June 3, 1864. His talk tonight is based on his most recent book, *Carrying the Flag. The Story of Private Charles Whilden, the Confederacy's Most Unlikely Hero*. Mr. Rhea last spoke to our CWRT in the 2000-2001 year.



## Battlefield Preservation

BY MARY MUNSELL ABROE

**Battlefield Preservation Fund Committee Met in September:** The BPF committee of the CWRT met on September 29, 2007 at the home of chair Rob Girardi. All members in good standing of the CWRT are invited to attend BPF meetings; CWRT member Paula Walker was present. BPF committee members present were Mary Abroe, Larry Gibbs, Rob Girardi, Nancy Jacobs, Jerome Kowalski, Roger Rudich, and Bob Stoller. Marshall Krolick, Brian Seiter, and David Zucker were absent. Minutes are as follows:

1.) BPF treasurer Mary Abroe presented a summary of BPF donations for FY 2000-01 through FY 2006-07; said fiscal years constitute the life span of the Battlefield Preservation Fund as a distinct fund (separate from the general treasury) of the Civil War Round Table of Chicago. Donations of the Chicago BPF to Civil War battlefield preservation organizations and projects total approximately \$50,000 for those fiscal years.

2.) There was discussion of ways to inform the CWRT membership about current preservation issues and about new ways in which to raise funds for preservation.

3.) Beginning with the November 2007 meeting, the BPF committee will highlight a different site in need of financial assistance each month. Proceeds from the silent auction and book drawing that month will go to the highlighted site, with matching funds from the BPF up to \$500 per month to augment our donors' generosity. The sites/organizations chosen by the committee as targeted sites are as follows: Central Virginia Battlefields Trust (November 2007); Friends of Wilderness Battlefield (December 2007); Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation (January 2008); Mt. Zion [Virginia] Church (February 2008); and the Confederate Museum in New Orleans (March 2008).

4.) The committee approved a donation to the National Museum of Civil War Medicine (\$500) and to the Carter House (Franklin) campaign of the Civil War Preservation Trust (\$1,000)

5.) The committee authorized renewal of the CWRT's current memberships in various preservation organizations during FY

2007-08, the total of those renewal costs not to exceed \$4,000.

**CWRT Receives Thanks for Donations:** After this newsletter went to press for the June issue and over the summer, we received notes of gratitude for contributions from our Battlefield Preservation Fund to several projects and organizations. In late June Parker Hills (of Friends of Raymond) and Terry Winschel of the National Park Service at Vicksburg responded to the joint donation (from the Round Table and member Roger Bohn) made to the Friends late last spring. Parker Hills stated the following: "On behalf of **Friends of Raymond** I wish to thank the Civil War Round Table of Chicago and Roger Bohn for the most generous donation of \$500 received from the auction (and matching donation by the Round Table) of the United States flag that flew at the Illinois Memorial at Vicksburg National Military Park during the 2006 centennial year of that magnificent structure....As a brief progress report..., Friends of Raymond has completed its 3/4 mile walking and interpretive trail on the Raymond battlefield, and is currently working to acquire 66.62 acres of core battlefield property which is now on the market. The support of your organization...is greatly valued." In the same vein, Terry Winschel wrote as follows: "How deeply touched I am by the generosity of the Civil War Round Table of Chicago through its support of Friends of Raymond. Please know that the sacred soil that is preserved through this donation...will...stand as a reminder to future generations of the generosity and dedication of your membership whose commitment to preservation reflects the gratitude that we as a nation, and collectively as a people, owe to those whose service has safeguarded our liberties."

From Ron Elkins, president of the **Wilson's Creek National Battlefield** Foundation, came the following sentiments: "...I want to take this opportunity to thank you for becoming a Foundation Sponsor with your recent gift of \$500.00 to be used in the continued work of the Foundation....Over the years the Foundation has participated proudly in

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The only requirement for membership in The Round Table is a genuine interest in the Civil War and its era. For information, address Membership Committee, 9670 N. Dee #205 Des Plaines, Illinois 60016, or contact [bsallardice1@peoplepc.com](mailto:bsallardice1@peoplepc.com).

many improvement projects, assisting the National Park Service to secure the needed resources and develop the battlefield so that visitors can appreciate the events that occurred on a hot August day in 1861. Since its initial purchase of 37 acres on Bloody Hill, the Foundation has been actively involved in preserving the natural Ozarks setting that was the scene of this historic battle. Your financial commitment is greatly appreciated."

Rusty Trowbridge, business manager of historic **Beauvoir**, thanked the Civil War Round Table for its gift as follows: "On behalf of Beauvoir's Combined Boards and staff, thank you for your donation of \$500.00 to the Jefferson Davis Home & Presidential Library. As you already know our facility has been severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina. The support of organizations such as yours is a vital part of our recovery effort. The funds that you have donated will go into our rebuilding fund which will help us to restore our museum structures and facilities....Beauvoir House has been badly damaged but is restorable. We have signed a contract with a firm that specializes in historic restoration and work has begun. We anticipate completion in the spring of 2008....Thank you for your dedication to our museum and the preservation of Jefferson Davis's last home. We look forward to a bright future as our facility works to restore this national treasure and to once again educate the world about Jefferson Davis and the Confederate soldier."

## NOVEMBER MEETING

BY TOM TRECOTT

“Could the South Have Won the Civil War?”, a topic of endless debate among scholars and buffs, was the subject of John Y. Simon’s talk to 75 members and guests November 9 at the 665th regular meeting of the Civil War Round Table.

The North had considerable advantages going into the conflict. The overall population was greater (19 million to 12 million), as was Northern manufacturing, transportation, and finance. The Union was eventually able to put 2 million men in uniform, as opposed to 750,000 for the Confederacy. At its peak in 1863, the Confederate forces were only 55% of the Federal.

Why then were the Confederates so confident about their chances? For one thing, there was the southern belief in the superiority of its fighting men --- outdoorsmen versus shopkeepers and immigrants. A second strong belief was in “King Cotton”; the importance of southern cotton in the world economy would eventually force foreign intervention to break the blockade. Thirdly, the Confederacy thought there was no natural tie between the Northeast and the West (what we call today the Midwest), and the disruption of the Mississippi River trade would show the West’s natural ties were with the South, resulting in more states seceding. Finally, there was a belief in “Southern Unity”, an expectation of a common bond among the 15 slave states.

Despite this confidence going into the conflict, two major blunders seriously damaged the South’s chances. The first was the way Confederate President Jefferson Davis handled the crisis at Ft. Sumter. The situation was critical when Lincoln took office, and his cabinet advised him to abandon the fort to South Carolina, reasoning that giving up Sumter would prevent the upper South from seceding --- “Fort for States”. Lincoln, however, decided to keep Sumter supplied, and Davis wanted the fort surrendered immediately. Robert Toombs, the Confederate

Secretary of State, warned Davis that an attack on the fort would be like “hitting a hornet’s nest”. But Davis ordered P.G.T. Beauregard, in command of the secessionist forces, to demand Ft. Sumter’s surrender. When Union commander Major Robert Anderson declined, the fort began being shelled early on the morning of April 12, 1861, and was finally surrendered April 14.

The consequences were disastrous for the South. The attack on the flag was a patriotic wakeup call across the North, and while four more slave states seceded as a result of Lincoln’s call for troops (Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina), four more didn’t, depriving the Confederacy of that many more states, three of them vital (Missouri, Kentucky, and Maryland). The attack on Ft. Sumter unified northern Democrats and Republicans, and many Southern Unionists fought for the Union (including the 1st Alabama Cavalry, a favorite of the speaker).

Our speaker offered an interesting analogy to show what Jefferson Davis should have done. Cuban Dictator Fidel Castro hates the presence of U.S. forces in Guantanamo Bay on his island, but knowing any attack would be futile, he chooses to live with it, and he has remained in power for almost 50 years now. Perhaps if Davis had simply left Ft. Sumter alone, the wayward sisters may have gone in peace. But Southern honor seemed to dictate otherwise.

The second blunder was also in 1861. In May, Kentucky, with its secessionist governor and unionist legislature, declared its “neutrality”. Both sides recruited in the state, but no troops violated her borders until September 3, when forces led by Confederate Generals Leonidas Polk and Gideon Pillow occupied Columbus. Davis refused to order their withdrawal --- in fact authorizing the Confederate occupation of Kentucky. This resulted in this key state becoming a Union asset.

An ongoing problem for the Confederate war effort was the debate between an offensive and defensive strategy. Davis was for the latter, feeling that the South just needed to hold on until the North grew war weary. His top general Lee, on the other hand, thought that the South needed a grand victory to decide the issue. Our speaker believed that either strategy, used consistently, would have worked, but the Confederate high command was completely incapable of following a consistent defense policy. In 8 of 10 major battles between 1861 and 1863, the outnumbered South took 97,000 casualties to 77,000 for the Union, and the development of the use of entrenchments for defense was slow.

“States’ rights” was another detriment to the Southern cause. President Davis took a more nationalistic outlook, but his Vice-President Alexander Stephens and Governors Joseph Brown of Georgia and Zebulon Vance of North Carolina especially were constant militant states’ right thorns in his side, and thereby hurting the overall war effort.

The slave population was a factor that could be an asset or a liability for the C.S.A. Slaves could grow food, do camp work, be teamsters, cook, and be laborers, leaving white southerners free for military duty. On the other hand, 200,000 former slaves ended up fighting for the Union (20,000 of them cavalry), and these black troops proved decisive in the later campaigns.

Perhaps the “will to fight” was the deciding factor, or maybe just luck; if Lee was still in contact with Davis at Appomattox, he would have been ordered to wage guerilla warfare, with unknown consequences.

Ultimately, as our speaker reminded us, Union victory was not ordained by any means, and some events were controlled by Jefferson Davis, and some not.

## GRAPESHOT



On Nov. 14th CWRT ex-President **Marshall Krolick** spoke on "The Promotion of Custer, Merritt and Farnsworth" at the inaugural meeting of the Dayton, Ohio CWRT. On Jan. 8, 2008, Marshall, who knows where the winter weather is warm, will be speaking to the Palm Beach, Florida, CWRT, on a topic to be determined.

The University of Missouri Press has accepted CWRT ex-president **Bruce Allardice's** new book, *Jeff Davis' Colonels*, for publication. The 400+ page work is a biographical encyclopedia of the colonels of the Confederate army. The exact date of publication is as yet undetermined.

On Nov. 5th **Jerry Schur** spoke to the Lakeside Breakfast Club on "Lincoln's Assassination and Booth's Escape". Jerry repeated the lecture on Nov. 20th to two men's clubs at the Weinger JCC.

**Rob Girardi** addressed the South Suburban CWRT Nov. 15th on "Civil War Engineers." On January 4th, 2008 Rob will address the Salt Creek CWRT on "General Impressions of the Civil War."

Know of any upcoming talks, events, or publications? All members are welcome to contribute items to the newsletter. Contact the editor at bsallardice1@peoplepc.com or (847) 375-8305.

### SCHIMMELFENNIG BOUTIQUE

Fifty-seven years of audio recordings of CWRT lectures by distinguished historians are available and can be purchased in either audio cassette or CD format. For lecture lists, contact Hal Ardell at hal229@ameritech.net or phone him at (773) 774-6781.

Each meeting features a book raffle, with proceeds going to battlefield preservation. There is also a silent auction for books donated by Ralph Newman and others, again with proceeds benefiting battlefield preservation.

### Executive Committee Meeting

The mid-year meeting of the Executive Committee of the CWRT will be held Saturday, Jan. 26th, 2008, at the Chicago History Museum, starting at 9 a.m. CWRT members are welcome to attend.

### Battlefield Tour

It's that time again to start signing up for next year's CWRT battlefield tour! We're going to Shiloh, Corinth and Brice's Crossroads May 1-4, 2008. HQ is the Holiday Inn Express in Corinth, and as usual **Ed Bearss** will be the lead tour guide, with the able assistance of the Shiloh NBP's **Stacey Allen**. Take a look at the attached tour registration form and sign up soon! The tour reading list and schedule information is on the website at [www.thecwrt.org](http://www.thecwrt.org).

The **Confederate Memorial Hall** in New Orleans is still feeling the effects of Hurricane Katrina. Itself undamaged (thankfully) by the storm and flood, the general downturn in tourism to that city has reduced the Hall's daily attendance so much that they are appealing for funds to tide them over until the tourism revives. Visit their website at [www.confederatemuseum.com](http://www.confederatemuseum.com) to learn how to contribute to this unique and important Civil War site.

## Bulletin Board



### FUTURE MEETINGS

Regular meetings are held at the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 North Orleans Street, the second Friday of each month, *unless otherwise indicated*.

Dec. 14: **Gordon Rhea**, "Charles Whilden and the Wilderness"

Jan. 11, 2008: **Ed Cotham**, "Civil War Marines"

Feb. 8: **David Long**, Topic TBD

March 14: **Brian Wills**, "Civil War in Cinema"

April 11: **Jennifer Weber**, "Copperheads"

May 9: **Stephen Engel**, "Franz Sigel"

June 13: **Bill Farina**, "U. S. Grant"

### Virtual Book Signings

In the continuing series of Virtual Book Signings at the Abraham Lincoln Bookstore, Wiley Sword, a great friend of our CWRT, will be signing his new book, *Courage Under Fire*, at noon on Dec. 1st. The Oct. 20 book signing of Bob Miller's new book, *Both Prayed to the Same God*, is archived and can be watched via the internet. The web address for accessing and watching these signings is [www.VirtualBookSigning.net](http://www.VirtualBookSigning.net).

Best wishes to all this Holiday season!