



# THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Volume LXXX1, Number 2

Chicago, Illinois

October 2021

805th REGULAR MEETING, Friday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## David Dixon on

### ***"The American Civil War: A Radical, International Revolution"***

**Live/Zoom Meeting. Time: Oct. 8, 2021, 07:30 PM CST**

**Zoom Option ID 878 0229 5971; Passcode: 501583**



On October 8th historian David Dixon will talk about an aspect of the Civil War not often discussed--"the role of foreign, German transplants"--based on the life of one of those immigrants, August Willich.

Dixon's latest book, *Radical Warrior: August Willich's Journey from German Revolutionary to Union General* (on which this talk is based) is the biography of a Prussian army officer who renounced his nobility and joined in the failed European revolutions of 1848. He emigrated to America, edited a daily labor newspaper in Cincinnati, and

became one of the most accomplished generals in the Union Army. This story sheds new light on the contributions of 200,000 German-Americans who fought for the Union in the Civil War.

In an age of global social, economic, and political upheaval, transatlantic radicals helped affect America's second great revolution. For many recent immigrants, the nature and implications of that revolution turned not on Lincoln's relatively conservative goal of maintaining the national Union, but on issues of social justice, including slavery, free labor, and popular self-government. The Civil War was not simply a war to end sectional divides, but to restore the soul of the nation, revive the hopes of democrats worldwide, and defend human rights.

David Dixon earned his M.A. in history from the University of Massachusetts in 2003. His first book, *The Lost Gettysburg Address*, told the unusual life story of Texas

slaveholder Charles Anderson, whose speech followed Lincoln's at Gettysburg, but was never published. It turned up 140 years later in a cardboard box in Wyoming.

David has presented to more than sixty Civil War Round Tables from coast to coast. He hosts B-List History, a website that features obscure characters and their compelling stories at [www.davidtdixon.com](http://www.davidtdixon.com). David's latest book, published by the University of Tennessee Press, is the biography of German revolutionary and Union General August Willich. His current project is a biography that highlights the role of emotions in Southern allegiance in the Civil War.

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## **Battlefield Preservation**

### **American Battlefield Trust—Manassas Opportunity**

In 1921, 100 years back, a park was established at the Henry Farm to preserve the land where both Battles of Manassas (commonly known as the Battles of Bull Run) were fought. It was the only preserved battlefield land at Manassas until the federal government secured more land in May 1940 and established the Manassas National Battlefield Park.

Since that time, and especially in the past 35 years, northern Virginia has experienced tremendous growth and development, leaving the Battlefield in a precarious position of being surrounded by data and distribution centers, massive solar farms, and new developments of “McMansions.”

While we can take pride in securing more than 370 acres of hallowed ground at the Manassas Battlefield, a small parcel of land in the northern part of the Park is especially threatened—the site near the Sudley Church where the Union Army set up a field hospital and where, later, the 21st Georgia regiment used the Church as a hospital for sick soldiers. Many of these Georgians who died of disease may well be buried near the church, making this not only hallowed ground but sacred ground as well.

To purchase of the 3.5-acre plot near the Church and save it from the threat of development, we need to raise \$75,000 quickly. We have already secured funding from other sources, which makes every dollar you invest in this plot of land worth \$5.13. With this purchase, we will have protected a total of 377 acres of sacred history that was written in blood on these grounds.

Please make your most generous gift today to help us raise \$75,000 and save 3.5 critical acres of land near the Sudley Church at the Manassas National Battlefield Park. Once secured, it will be added to the Park and protected for generations to come.

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## September Meeting

By Mark Matranga

**Eric Wittenberg** presented an informative talk to The Civil War Round Table at its 804th Regular Meeting on September 10, 2021, on the formation of West Virginia, our 35<sup>th</sup> state. Seemingly a measure by an administration determined to secure its strategic flank, what caused the dismemberment of the Commonwealth of Virginia is a far more complex political, social, and demographic story which Wittenberg set out in “Seceding from Secession: The Creation of West Virginia.”

The roots of intrastate conflict in Virginia can be traced to the Revolutionary era when wealthy Tidewater planters were able to enact successive state constitutions granting eastern interests – large landholders and slaveholders – disproportionate political representation and consequent political power. This included provisions for voting based on property holdings which most western Virginians did not possess. Despite certain reforms made in the years immediately prior to the outbreak of war, fundamental differences between the two sections of the state persisted.

The fundamentals of the schism were economic as well as cultural and were influenced by geography. The Anglo-Saxon Tidewater planters adhered to Anglicanism; they were not inclined toward internal improvements as their agricultural products shipped via estuaries out to the Atlantic. The Northwest’s population was predominantly Scotch-Irish and Methodist. A mountainous, rocky region, the rivers of the Northwest counties and its commerce flowed toward the Ohio River. The area’s emerging extractive industries relied mainly on free labor and looked for improvements in transportation over rugged terrain in moving their products to distant markets. Important to note were the relative slave populations of the eastern two-thirds of the state, 31%, versus the western third, 4%.

The divergent nature of the economies of the two sections eventually led to a split in their approaches to the emerging sectional issues dividing the country along a north-south fault line. Finally, geographical factors led to division: Wheeling was a mere 60 miles from Pittsburgh but 360 miles from Richmond. Earlier in the history of the region, Henry Clay rather presciently referred to that part of the state as ‘West Virginia.’

When the sectional crisis reached an impasse after Lincoln’s election, secessionist elements in Virginia attempted to join the fledgling Confederacy. Governor John Lecher, in alliance with former president John Tyler, sought to have state militia transferred to the separatist government but was thwarted as Virginia had yet to

secede. But once the first shots of the war were fired and Lincoln called for volunteers, Virginia seceded, with approximately 60% of the votes against secession coming from trans-Allegheny delegates.

This prompted the Northwestern Counties own separatist movement. Archibald Campbell, publisher of the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, called a meeting in Wheeling on May 13, 1861, when a vote on statehood was withheld- Virginia had yet to secede; it was agreed to reconvene if the pending Ordinance of Secession was passed which it did on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. A second convention commenced on June 11, 1861, when the delegates called for reorganization of the state under the theory that secession had resulted in all government offices being vacated. The Convention elected Francis Harrison Pierpont Governor; John Carlisle and Waitman Willey were named Senators.

The road to statehood proceeded as follows: In August 1861 delegates drafted an ordinance forming the state of Kanawha; later, in October, voters in the designated counties approved this ordinance; delegates drafted a constitution for the State of West Virginia in November which was approved in February 1862 and passed overwhelmingly by the voters on April 24, 1862. Willey moved the statehood bill through Congress and by year's end it was passed and was on the President's desk. Lincoln polled the cabinet which was divided. The President considered two issues: 1) Was statehood constitutional; 2) was it politically expedient. Albeit he had reservations regarding its constitutionality, Lincoln signed the bill and West Virginia became a state effective December 31, 1862.

Wittenberg emphasized the critical role the B&O Railroad played in the politics of West Virginia statehood. The B&O was a critical supply line, bringing food and material from the Midwest to the eastern theater. The administration took action early on to secure this vital artery, devoting a separate division to protect the railroad and the C&O Canal. The threat to the railroad may have been a compelling reason for Lincoln's decision to dismember one of the founding states of the union. The constitutionality of West Virginia statehood was dubious, the administration's action certainly unprecedented.

One notes that West Virginia has been called 'A State of Convenience.' However, given the dramatic differences between the two sections of the Old Dominion, one questions whether there may not have been an inevitable civil war within Virginia. Historian Dennis Frye observed that the Civil War was merely the opportunity for West Virginia statehood, not the cause. "A state born of conviction," he says, whose citizens determined to separate from an oppressive Richmond regime.

Eric Wittenberg, best known for his excellent works on cavalry operations has used considerable legal skills to tackle one of the most perplexing issues produced by the

Civil War. He and his co-authors have added admirably to the literature of the war and to West Virginia history with their work on the birth of the Mountain State.

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## BULLETIN BOARD

The **Kenosha Civil War Museum** is putting on programs which can be watched on facebook:

On Saturday, October 2, at 1PM, the Civil War Museum proudly presents a free musical program with Chris Vallillo entitled ***Lost Songs of the Civil War***.

For more on programs at the museum, visit

<https://museums.kenosha.org/civilwar/events/>

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The **Congress of Civil War Round Tables** is sponsoring a series of virtual Civil War Lectures by some of the nation's leading historians. Visit

<http://www.cwrtcongress.org/lectures.html> to view the complete schedule and register

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Past CWRT President **Rob Girardi** has a busy month of presentations:

October 10	SCV Tomb Ceremony/Oakwoods Cemetery
October 13	CWRT of the Merrimack/The Civil War Generals
October 14	Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain CWRT/Railroad Defense in the Atlanta Campaign
October 15	CWRT of New Hampshire/Railroad Defense in the Atlanta Campaign

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On September 30<sup>th</sup> , starting at 3:30 CST, the **Abraham Lincoln Bookshop's** "House Divided" series will feature an interview with author Caroline E. Janney, who will discuss her latest book, *Ends of War: The Unfinished Fight of Lee's Army After Appomattox*. Visit <https://alincolnbookshop.com/> for more.

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## More Upcoming Local Civil War Events

Due to government-ordered shutdowns, CWRT events are being cancelled or going online on an ad hoc basis. Contact the sponsoring organization for up-to-date details. Check the **Announcements** section of the CWRT's website for additional coming events.

Oct. 1st, Northern Illinois CWRT: Laurie Schiller on "Buford's Brigade at Gettysburg"

Oct. 2nd, Two Old Goats in Cedar Lake: Rick Zaar and Richard Crowe on "Haunted Gettysburg"

Oct. 7th, Milwaukee CWRT: David Dixon on "August Willich"

Oct. 12th, McHenry County CWRT: Scott Larimer on "Civil War Forts"

Oct. 19th, Lincoln-Davis CWRT: Mark Pohlad on "Lincoln in American Art"

Oct. 23rd, Salt Creek CWRT: Rob Girardi on "Chicago's Memory of the Civil War"

Oct. 28th, South Suburban CWRT: Don McArthur on "The 8th Illinois Cavalry"

## Future Chicago CWRT Meetings

Nov. 12th: Tom Clemens on *Joseph K. Mansfield*

Dec. 10th: Dennis Doyle on *Illinois Regiments at Gettysburg*

Jan. 14th, 2021: Jen Murray on *General Meade*

Feb. 11th: Ann Durkin Keating on *Juliette Kinzie, the Civil War, and the Making of Chicago*

March 11th: Mark Laubacher on *The USS Red Rover: Hospital of Firsts*

Apr. 8th: Jeffrey Hunt on *Meade and Lee at Rappahannock Station and Mine Run*

May 13th: Dr. Thomas Carson on *Lincoln as Moral Exemplar*

June 10th: Lauren Szady on *TBD*

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## List of Presentations Added to CWRT Website

A new feature has been added to the CWRT's website: a list of all the speakers and topics since the first meeting in December 1940. This is part of our CWRT's history—check it out! The link to the list can be found on the home page of the website.

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## 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Ed Bearss Award

As all Round Table members know, in past years we solicited donations before and during our annual battlefield tours after which Ed chose a worthy organization to receive the Bearss award. Now with Ed's passing, the Tour Chair, in consultation with Battlefield Preservation, will be making the award in Ed's memory. This year, Jon Sebastian, Tour Chair and current President, has chosen the Stafford County Civil War Park as recipient of the Bearss Award. Jon and the Committee were very impressed with the work the Stafford County Historical Society has done in preserving and interpreting the Army of the Potomac 1862-63 winter encampment site. This site was a fascinating addition to the tour this year as it added a 'camp life' perspective to the Fredericksburg-Chancellorsville campaigns, giving us a glimpse of how the soldiers lived after the campaign season ended.

The following are those who donated to this year's Bearss Fund:

Mary Abroe

Bruce Allardice & Leslie Goddard

Marsha Boblitz

Terry Carr

Jim Cunningham

Randy Doler

Dennis Doyle

Lori Duginski

Gary Fine

Marybeth Foley

Dave Gapinski

Rob Girardi

Cindy Heckler

John Horn

Tom & Rosemary King

Robert Maloney

Mark Matranga

Ginny Proconier

Dave Richert

Roger Rudich

Geoff Sebastian

Brian Seiter

Jerry Schur

Curt Thomasco

Pete & Ellen Williams

Jackie Wilson

