

## HISTORY OF THE HERSHEY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Nestled in the historic Lebanon Valley to the east of the Pennsylvania state capital in Harrisburg, Hershey is named after Milton S. Hershey, the candy magnate who made milk chocolate available to the masses. It is popularly known as “The Sweetest Place on Earth.” One of the organizations that adds to the quality of life in Hershey is its Civil War Round Table.

The Hershey Civil War Round Table was founded in 1992 in response to the interest that was stimulated by Ken Burns’ iconic documentary on “The Civil War.” A group of Hershey Foods supervisors who were interested in the Civil War came up with the idea of meeting to discuss the Civil War on their lunch breaks, which led to further discussions on organizing trips and inviting guest speakers to make presentations. With the adoption of by-laws, the Hershey Civil War Round Table was formally instituted with the following officers/members:

President	John Payne
Vice President	Todd Pagliarulo
Treasurer	Webb Dows
Secretary	Joe O’Connell
Speaker/Trip Coordinator	John Plessinger
Founding Member	Bill Jackson
Founding Member	Jack Thomas

The newly-constituted Round Table met in what was called the old Hershey Room at the old Hershey Library located at the west end of the former Hershey High School, across from the Hershey Theater. The first meetings involved informal discussions of the Ken Burns documentary, which captivated the nation when it was first broadcast in nightly episodes on public television. These discussions gave way to “book reports” by our members on Civil War topics they had read about. Visits to Gettysburg and other battlefields led to invitations for Licensed Battlefield Guides to address our Round Table. Speakers were also recruited from the nearby US Army War College and US Army Heritage & Education Center in Carlisle, PA.

As word of our meetings spread and attendance increased, we moved our meetings to the newly-built Hershey Public Library on Cocoa Avenue, and when we outgrew that venue we moved to our current location in the multi-purpose room of the Country Meadows retirement home in Hershey, which has the added benefit of enabling residents of the home to attend our meetings without having to travel. We meet there the third Thursday of every month except December, beginning at 7:30 pm. We attract speakers from all over the country, many of whom are celebrated authors who jump at the chance to visit “Chocolatetown, USA.”

In conjunction with our colleagues at the Harrisburg Civil War Round Table, we conduct two field trips a year, one in the spring and one in the fall. These field trips are very popular and often sell out weeks or months in advance. Recent trips took us to the

Cavalry Battlefields of Gettysburg, the Seven Days' Battlefields around Richmond, the Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864, Lee's Retreat from Gettysburg, the Battle of Monocacy and the National Museum of Civil War Medicine in Frederick, Harpers Ferry, and the Battle of the Wilderness. World-class tour guides like Dennis Frye and Chris Mackowski have stimulated even more interest in our organization.

In addition to our monthly meetings and semi-annual field trips, we have organized several "family caravan" tours of Gettysburg with a Licensed Battlefield Guide. We also support the nearby National Civil War Museum in Harrisburg with its annual "Civil War Days" programs, and recruited new members at the Lincoln Funeral Train Re-enactment at the Stone Gables Estate (*a.k.a.* "The Star Barn") in Elizabethtown. We're on Facebook, and we maintain a web presence. For more information on our organization and a list of upcoming speakers, go to: [www.hersheycwrt.org](http://www.hersheycwrt.org) Better yet, attend one of our meetings and experience our enthusiasm for the study of the Civil War first-hand.

