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History and Activities of The Civil War Round Table of the District Of Columbia

"The Civil War round tables have been in the forefront in enhancing our understanding and appreciation of the Civil War — the single most important experience that helped frame our national identity — and in maintaining the substance of this heritage."

— **Edwin C. Bearss**, Chief Historian Emeritus, National Park Service; and
Honorary Lifetime Member of the Civil War Round Table of the District of Columbia

The Beginning: From a Log at Second Manassas/Bull Run

In February 1935, Joseph Mills Hanson, Willard Webb, James Turner and Garnet W. Jex brushed the snow from a log overlooking the field of Second Manassas/Bull Run and sat down to reflect on how, bitten by the Civil War bug themselves, they could infect others (See sketch below). Calling themselves the "Battlefield Crackpates," they started the idea of the Round Tables, now numbering over 100 throughout the United States. An audio recording with a delightful description of the genesis of various round tables is posted at <https://soundcloud.com/cwrtdc/bruce-catton-1952>

The Civil War Round Table of the District of Columbia (CWRTDC) was organized by 26 attendees at meeting in a local elementary schoolhouse in 1951, with the aim of sharing their interests. Bruce Catton was the featured speaker at the second meeting — his topic was "Mr. Lincoln's Army" — held at the old Washington Post building at 1515 L Street, NW, Washington, DC. See CWRTDC's newsletters posted at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kcnij0E-GghKy8CILBqVBtWIYI4iaXfD/view>

But like Pope on that Manassas field, they had grabbed something bigger than expected. Increasing membership moved the meetings from their homes to the Army and Navy Club. During the Centennial, 1961-65, the membership grew to more than 600, requiring it to move its dinner meetings to the ballroom of the National Press Club, then to the Officers' Clubs at Fort Lesley J. McNair and Fort Myer. After the temporary popularity of the Centennial, and later the Sesquicentennial beginning in 2015, its rolls diminished to those whose interest and enthusiasm extended beyond those commemorations. Its membership now numbers about 120.

To the rostrum during its first few decades came the ablest speakers, including Douglas Southall Freeman, Robert S. Henry, Bell I. Wiley, Virgil Carrington "Pat" Jones as well as many knowledgeable and articulate members of its Round Table. More recently, such speakers have included: Ed Bearss, Frank Cooling, Noah Andre Trudeau, Sidney Blumenthal, Buzz Carnahan, Bud Robertson, Edna Greene Medford, Greg Mertz, Frank O'Reilly, Emmanuel Dabney, Tom Perry, Gary Adelman, Marc Thompson and many more.

To the Present: What the CWRTDC Is and What It Does

The purpose of the Civil War Round Table of the District of Columbia, as stated in its bylaws, is to stimulate and expand interest in the military, political and sociological history of the United States and particularly the Civil War. The CWRTDC is incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia and is registered as a 501(c) entity, IRS No. 20-1582130.

Among its many achievements, the CWRTDC spawned the National Civil War Centennial Commission and the leadership that led to its establishment. Its organization was also instrumental in preventing an interstate highway from being built across the Manassas Battlefield. The CWRTDC continues to take an active role in the preservation of Civil War historical fields and landmarks, particularly those in and surrounding the Nation's Capital.

The CWRTDC meets on the second Tuesday of each month, September through June, at the Officers' Club (Patton Hall) of Fort Myer, 214 Jackson Ave., in Arlington, VA. Meetings generally consist of a social hour followed by a dinner and a speaker. Topics cover a broad spectrum of Civil War interests, and speakers include noted Civil War historians, professors, authors and artists.

The CWRTDC also sponsors field trips, tours and other events. Recent tours have included visits to Spotsylvania, Vicksburg, Chickamauga, Chancellorsville, Petersburg, Antietam, the Lost Avenue, Appomattox Court House, Fredericksburg, Monocacy, Culp's Hill, and the Daniel Lady Farm.

For more information about the CWRTDC and its activities, visit its website at www.cwrtdc.org or send an email to admin@cwrtdc.org. The CWRTDC's website posts information about its upcoming meetings and tours, hosts audio-recordings of past speakers, publishes book and media reviews, and lists Civil War history-related resources. A tri-fold brochure with more information about the CWRTDC is available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4wTY4gLxnpPVTcxZG9NWV9wTVk/view>

The Original "Crackpates" at Second Manassas, February 10, 1935:



Left to right: Joseph M. Hanson, Willard Webb, James Turner, Garnet Jex. Sketch by Garnet Jex.



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