

A Brief History of the Sacramento Civil War Round Table

By Dr. Donald J. Hayden (04-15-2010)

The Sacramento Civil War Round Table (SCWRT) was founded in June 1961 by five Directors who were named Sherrill Halbert (Sacramento), James H. Oakley (Sacramento), Charles B. Leavenworth (Rancho Cordova), J. T. McMnamin Sacramento), and Chester Gannon (Sacramento). Founded as a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, the Sacramento CWRT is one of the oldest Round Tables in California. No records remain of those early days except the Articles of Incorporation and the By-Laws. The mission was and is to perpetuate interest in the Civil War, further the collection of Civil War relics and weapons, preserve Civil War records, impart Civil War knowledge, and encourage visits to Civil War sites. Establishing the Round Table may have been the 100-year anniversary of the War, however, the exact reason(s) is unknown.

The Round Table Founders' interest was probably historical but many members may have been re-enactors and, as in later years, the demonstration and firing of period weapons and obtaining gunpowder became an important, if not the primary, interest of the Club. Bill Donaldson has been a member of the Sacramento CWRT since the 1970s' and said the Club had few members at that time. Bill became President in 1976 and the Round Table grew to about forty members. His tenure led to a revision of the Corporate Articles and By-Laws and the addition of monthly speakers and a newspaper, the "Battle Cry." Members of the Round Table frequently attended and participated in public events and parades, and made educational presentations at schools and other venues. Monthly meetings were held at various places around Sacramento and sometimes in members' homes. In 1977, Eric Ericson volunteered his theater on "R" Street as a regular meeting place. Annual dues at that time were six dollars per family.

During the 1980s,' the group continued along the same path. Lectures were given more frequently and public appearances continued but slowly the members drifted away. Eugene R. Morrow was the President in the mid-eighties and some meetings were attended by ten or less members. Efforts were made to increase attendance. Ken Hansgen became the Secretary and was excellent at preserving records and recording the minutes of the Round Table. Ken retired and moved to Savannah, Tennessee in 1996 and became a tour guide at Shiloh National Battlefield.

In the 1990s,' new members joined in large numbers, maybe in part to the Ken Burns' 1990 documentary "The Civil War." Many are still with the Round Table; Carol and Steve Breiter, George W. Foxworth, John Zasso, Mitch and Ardith Cnota, Fred Bohmfalk, Paul Ruud, Donald J. Hayden, and others. Carol became the President in 1994 and slowly changed the monthly meeting format to educational presentations. Carol was President for multiple years. George became the Treasurer in 1994 and remains at that post to this day. At his first meeting as a new member in 1996, Walt Bittle volunteered as Secretary where he remained until he moved to Warrenton, Missouri in 2004. Fred Bohmfalk became the first Editor of the Battle Cry in 1995, followed by Bernardo Buenrostro in 1997

and Paul Ruud in 1999. Up to 1995, the Battle Cry was published by the President with a host of other duties. In 1998, Jerry Russell from Civil War Round Table Associates of Little Rock, Arkansas, asked the Sacramento CWRT to host the 16th West Coast Civil War Conference. In 1999, the Sacramento CWRT joined the computer age and a website (<http://www.sacramentocwrt.com>) was set up by Bernardo Buenrostro and Steve Breiter. Bernardo became the Webmaster at that time and remained until 2007.

In the year 2000, the Sacramento CWRT hosted the 16th West Coast Civil War Conference in Sacramento. The speakers were Wiley Sword, Brian Wills, Herman Hattaway, Tom Cartwright, and Jim Stanbery. The subject was "Shiloh" and Fred Bohmfalk was the Conference Chairman. Paul Ruud was elected President in 2001 and served for multiple years. He was followed by Dennis Kohlmann and Don Hayden who also served for multiple years. Jim Middleton became the lifetime Battle Cry Editor in 2001. In 2006, the Sacramento CWRT hosted the 22nd West Coast Civil War Conference and the subject was "War on the Waters." Dennis Kohlmann was the Conference Chairman and the speakers were Ed Bearss, Craig Symonds, Dennis Ringle, Kevin Foster, and Jim Stanbery.

Since the untimely death of Jerry Russell in 2003, most Round Tables (except the San Joaquin Valley CWRT) have not hosted the Annual Conference. Generally, the Sacramento CWRT always has the highest Conference attendance and continues to support the Conference. To further that tradition, the Sacramento and Elk Grove CWRTs are hosting the 27th Conference in 2011 and the subject is "1861." The speakers will be Craig Symonds, Brian Wills, William C. (Jack) Davis, Jim Stanbery, and Larry Tagg. Paul Ruud is the Conference Chairman.

Finally, the Sacramento CWRT serves as tour guides to lead Sacramento-area children at the annual Gibson Ranch Civil War Re-enactment Schools' Day Program, sponsored by the National Civil War Association (NCWA). The NCWA uses "living history" to help the public to better understand the American Civil War. By portraying the manner in which the soldiers and civilians lived, worked, fought, and died during the Civil War era, the NCWA hopes to keep alive the spirit and sacrifice made by the men, women, and children of that time. This is the Program that is presented to about 2,700 to 3,000 students each year. Upon request, the Round Table continues to provide Civil War presentations to other Round Tables, schools, and civic groups. For additional information about the Sacramento CWRT, such as presentations, meetings, location(s), and dates, go to the web site at <http://www.sacramentocwrt.com>.

The Sacramento CWRT plans to maintain an active Club and the Board of Directors are discussing how we might further the mission that was established by our Founding Fathers in 1961. The Board is also researching and writing a comprehensive history of the Round Table. Our hope is that the importance of the American Civil War in this nation's history will not be forgotten.