



# THE LIGHT POST

AUGUST 2025



## WHAT THE TENNESSEE VALLEY CWRT DOES TO ENGAGE MEMBERS

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*By Dr. Cheryl McAuley and Carol VanOrnum*

Operating your CWRT doesn't have to be all work and no play. The Tennessee Valley CWRT of Huntsville, Alabama, offers programs and events to balance their day-to-day operations with several fun activities. Members can benefit by becoming better acquainted in a more relaxed setting while sharing a common interest.

Engaging **sponsors** for multiple purposes has been worthwhile. Restaurant gift cards are a popular door prize to award at the end of each meeting. Most recently, a new sponsor offered to help with the Round Table's first "Premium Member" no-host luncheon. Those members who donate at least \$100 above the annual dues of \$30 achieve the "Premium" status and qualify for the sponsor's luncheon. The additional members' contributions help supplement our speakers' travel costs.

This year, TVCWRT organized several highly popular no-host **Ladies High Teas** at the Lanier House, a new sponsor. A group of six women, all members, enjoy the food and camaraderie. The Round Table's exposure creates

a partnership with the establishment and community. The TVCWRT and sponsor clarify that they simply provide a benefit for members and do not generate any additional revenue for the general treasury.

TVCWRT's first **Civil War Trivia Night** in March of 2025 became part of the annual presentation lineup and will kick off the new year in January, 2026.

**Staff Rides**, via rental bus, are serving to attract new members. Members are invited to sign up first before opening the event to the public. This year's ride to Shiloh National Battlefield is scheduled for November 1st. We're blessed to have scholar and retired Army Brigadier General Dr. John Scales present interpretive details while joining with other experts. Our biggest challenge is scheduling a Saturday that doesn't conflict with an Alabama Crimson Tide football game!

TVCWRT is experimenting with **Civil War board gaming** on the third Thursday of the month. Richard Walker, inventor and designer of the Civil War battle computer game in the late 1990s, recently spoke at our June membership meeting. A couple of history experts from the Huntsville gaming community attended and became new



A sample board game of the Battle of Shiloh.

members of our TVCWRT! For the board version, members surround a table set with the battlefield terrain. They roll dice and then strategically move regiments around the board, inching them toward a flanking maneuver, artillery barrage, or victory/defeat. The game takes teamwork.

"**The Little Round Table**" began 15 years ago and meets on an off week. Our facilitator builds a schedule and list of questions based on topics the members wish to discuss. A list of the study questions is distributed a week prior to the meeting. Members take turns leading the conversations and the 15 to 20 attendees hold lively and engaging discussions.

*(Continued on Page 3)*

## INVESTED IN YOUR FUTURE

By Mike Movius, President

The Congress was formed because it seemed that so many formerly successful Round Tables had ceased to exist. Several Round Table leaders decided to do our best to mitigate CWRT failures. In doing so, we discovered three universal reasons for their disappearance: A lack of community awareness that a CWRT exists, failure to acknowledge that change is sometimes necessary, and insufficient treasury to develop programs, a successful marketing effort, or host attractive activities. Let me break it down for you.

### Community Presence

We have spoken with many CWRT members. They like the continuity of meetings, their role within the organization, and the camaraderie of members who share the same passion for the Civil War. Many have concluded that public education has abandoned teaching American history and that the current generation is disinterested and hence, a deterioration in CWRT membership.

That is an oversimplification. But the point is that CWRTs seem to have become an island unto themselves. Many do little or no marketing and don't seem to believe that help is available. They seem to have accepted the inevitable loss of their beloved organization.

### Necessity for Change

George Bernard Shaw once said,

“Progress is impossible without change; and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.” Since The CWRT of Chicago was established in 1940, our society has undergone significant change...think Man on the Moon, Rock and Roll, the end to the Cold War, the establishment of the Internet, etc.

And yet, the basic CWRT meeting structure begun in the 1940s dominates the landscape: Dinner meetings with a no-host bar, a history lecture followed by a question and answer period, and a departure with “See you next month.” Few seek change as the opposition to change rules the roost. What's baffling is that the change seekers want to discard everything or that the resisters don't see the need.

### Funding

Let's first agree that money well-spent is a good thing. Yet, the adage that “Money doesn't grow on trees” is also true. So, how do Round Tables attract precious dollars? Many sell books or coffee and cookies, hold an annual auction, or take a “cut” from dinner sales. Some periodically raise their dues although that can cut both ways.

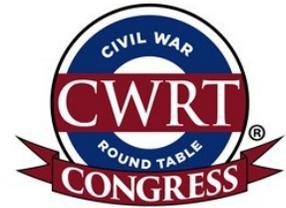
How do they spend their treasury? They become frugal by cutting back on the “unnecessary” and limit or eliminate honoraria. They let their treasury dictate their thoughts and behavior. They become stuck with low-cost

programs that are unattractive even to the most stalwart.

### CWRT Congress

So, how does the CWRT Congress work in the above landscape? First, our mission is to assist any CWRT seeking assistance. Second, we rely solely on donors who see the benefit of our programs and who have a genuine desire to make CWRTs become sustainable. Third, we host events that maximize the exchange of successful ideas, encourage peer-to-peer networking and minimize expenses.

In the coming weeks, the CWRT will launch a series of grant opportunities designed to encourage Round Tables to partner with other community entities, market effectively,



## IMPROVEMENT THROUGH EDUCATION AND NETWORKING

and develop no-tears fundraising. You can help by encouraging the distribution of our emails and newsletter to your CWRT members and by donating a small amount on a recurring basis.

<https://app.aplos.com/aws/give/CWRTCongress/2>

We are truly here for your CWRT.



Richmond Workshop 2025

## ACROSS THE POND—A CWRT IN ENGLAND HEARS FROM A U.S. ROUND TABLE MEMBER

By Kevin C. Donovan, Esq.

A while back, I learned about the American Civil War Round Table of the United Kingdom (<https://www.acwrt.org.uk/>) through an *Emerging Civil War* podcast interview of two of its leaders. Intrigued by the thought of a foreign-based Civil War Round Table, I offered to fly across the pond not only to share my expertise, but for the chance to experience a foreign perspective on our most traumatic national event.

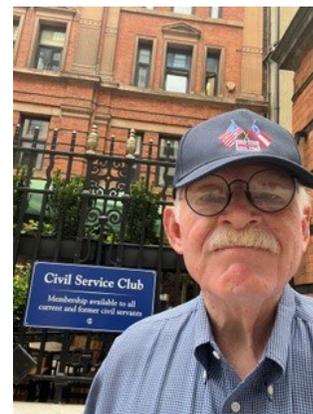
I am a member of the [Roanoke VA CWRT](#), and on June 28 I journeyed to London to speak to a British audience of American Civil War enthusiasts. My presentation topic was “The Court Martial of Fitz John Porter: Fair or Fixed?” As a retired lawyer, my goal was to offer a legal

analysis of the Porter trial, while also discussing the historical and political events that led to Maj. Gen. Porter’s conviction and dismissal from the U.S. Army. Some 30 UK Round Table members attended my talk, which was held at London’s Civil Service Club and also broadcast via Zoom link.

The UK Round Table members showed their truly deep engagement with and knowledge of our Civil War, asking me numerous probing questions following my speech. What was Abraham Lincoln’s role, if any, in having Porter court martialed? Did envy of Porter’s friendship with Army of the Potomac Commander George McClellan play a role in the prosecution? Was there any

negative impact of having a prominent Democrat, Reverdy Johnson, serve as defense counsel? Did Porter’s famous cousins Admirals David Dixon Porter and David Farragut try to help him? The UK members also solicited my personal legal analysis of defense counsels’ trial performance. Our stimulating conversation spilled over even after the formal meeting with continued discussion amid socializing at the Club bar.

Not only was it an exciting opportunity for me, but the resulting camaraderie forged a bond between two Round Tables that I hope will continue going forward. I even won first prize in their raffle!



Kevin Donovan is a member of Board of the [Roanoke CWRT](#) and member and contributor to *Emerging Civil War*. A list of his published works can be found at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/kevin-c-donovan-969b3422/>

## WHAT THE TENNESSEE VALLEY CWRT DOES TO ENGAGE MEMBERS (CONTINUED)

(Continued from Page 1)

For fundraising, TVCWRT will hold our first **yard sale** this Fall, encouraging members to donate Civil War related items and other household goods. Whatever is left by noon will be picked up by a charity truck. It’s a great way to empty closets and shelves at home.

In July, the TVCWRT viewed their first **movie matinee**, showing, what else, the 1993 movie *Gettysburg* on a big screen for members of TVCWRT.

As a final offering, one the board members is spearheading a 2026 “**Black Powder Shoot.**” Members and their families, along with the public, will be invited to participate for a fee. Not only will they get to hold a real black powder gun, feel the weight while imagining hauling it for miles on a march, but they can fire it, experience the acrid odor and the bitter taste of the smoke. Who wouldn’t like that! The Tennessee Valley Civil War Round Table is considering how

they might combine it with their America250 celebration.

For further information, contact the [TVCWRT](#).

Dr. Cheryl McAuley is President of the [Tennessee Valley CWRT](#).



## A PIONEERING PRESERVATION SUCCESS

By William E. Miller

Harrison Ruffin Tyler was the last surviving Grandson of John Tyler, our tenth President (1841-1845). In the fall of 1996, he purchased 800 acres of undeveloped property along the James River which included Fort Pocahontas, a Civil War earthen fortification constructed and occupied by United States Colored Troops. This is the story of Harrison Ruffin Tyler's singular effort to rediscover Fort Pocahontas, clear over 130 years of dense timbered overgrowth, and preserve the Fort to interpret the forgotten, but unique, story of the achievement of the USCT soldiers.

In early May of 1864, Major General Benjamin Butler's Union Army of the James advanced up

the James River to the area of Bermuda Hundred in order to threaten Richmond from the south. A series of protective fortifications were established along the banks of the river and occupied by Union troops to repel any Confederate attacks on Union supply vessels.

One such fortification was established on the north bank of the river at Wilson's Wharf in Charles City County. Units of United States Colored Troops were ordered to construct and occupy that fortification, which was subsequently named Fort Pocahontas. Patrols of USCT troops foraging from Fort Pocahontas into the County began to subject the local citizenry to the depredations of Union occupation. Complaints by the locals to the Confederate

government led to the dispatch of a Confederate Cavalry unit commanded by Major General Fitzhugh Lee to force the removal of the Union presence at Wilson's Wharf.

The Confederate Cavalry engaged the USCT troops defending Fort Pocahontas on May 24, 1864. The outnumbered USCT defenders repulsed the Confederate attacks, leading to an embarrassing retreat of the Cavalry back to support the Army of Northern Virginia's movements from the North Anna River toward Cold Harbor.

And so, the actions at Wilson's Wharf quickly became a footnote to the momentous battles at Cold Harbor and beyond, a backwater of sorts to the continuing carnage along the Richmond and Petersburg fronts.

But to the USCT troops that met and prevailed in the challenge of combatting the Confederate veterans, they proved their capabilities to stand and fight on an equal basis against their adversaries. While that recognition was acknowledged by a few, it too was lost as the armies moved on.

Fast forward to the 1990s. The National Park Service established a program to identify the locations of the hundreds of Civil War sites where battles occurred in order to protect them from development. By the early nineties, Fort Pocahontas was truly lost. Abandoned after the Civil War and covered in a dense overgrowth, it remained hidden from view despite the efforts of the NPS to

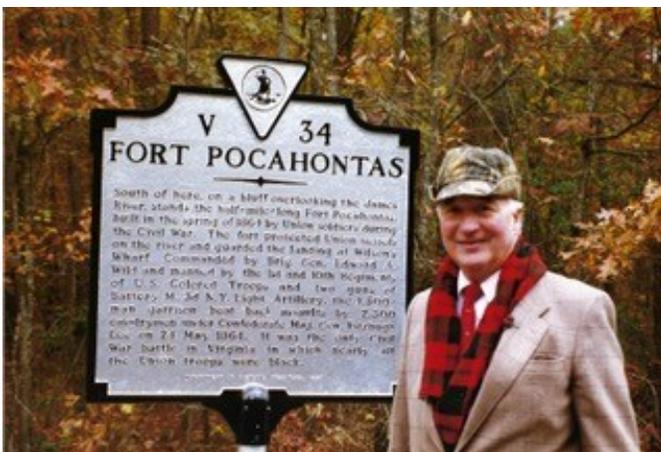
locate the site. But the property was not overlooked by developers intrigued by rural properties fronting along the James River.

**Harrison Tyler ... singularly implemented the restoration activities at personal cost to share the unique story of this special place.**

By 1993, with the assistance of Harrison Ruffin Tyler, the NPS located the site of Fort Pocahontas and reported on the pristine condition of the earthworks. The property owner at the time was a developer professing no interest in historical preservation. Enter Harrison Tyler, who purchased the property in 1996 and singularly implemented the restoration activities at personal cost to share the unique story of this special place.

In years past, I've been privileged to have met Mr. Tyler while visiting with small

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Harrison Ruffin Tyler proudly stands next to one of three "Fort Pocahontas" signs in VA Route 5 that he sponsored.

## A PIONEERING PRESERVATION SUCCESS (CONTINUED)

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tour groups. During a personal tour of “Sherwood Forest,” the restored home of President John Tyler, Mr. Tyler regaled us with the details of his unique ancestry which reaches back through Pocahontas to Chief Powhatan. He spoke of Virginia’s “First Families” as if they were cousins and neighbors and even shared the fire eating Edmund Ruffin as a Great Grandfather through his mother’s family tree. But beyond the genealogical smorgasbord, the memory of his unbridled enthusiasm as our golf cart tour guide while squiring us around “his” Fort Pocahontas has been unforgettable.

While Harrison Ruffin Tyler is no longer with us, having recently passed away at age 96 on May 25, 2025, his singular effort to preserve Fort Pocahontas will survive in our collective memories. His Foundation sponsors an annual Civil War reenactment event at Fort Pocahontas on the first weekend of June to honor the anniversary of the Battle that took place in late May of 1864. Over the two-day weekend, Civil War travelers, history buffs, and curiosity seekers flock to Fort Pocahontas to be treated by reenactors portraying USCT troops in defense and Confederate Cavalrymen attacking on horseback, complemented with the sounds of booming cannons and crackling musket fire.

The annual reenactment experience serves as a fitting epitaph to the forward vision and memory of Harrison Ruffin Tyler, a singular early pioneer in preservation.

*Bill Miller is President of the [Williamsburg CWRT](#) and is on the Board of the CWRT Congress.*



Photo: Mike Movius



Photo: Wikipedia

## CWRT CONGRESS HOLDS 2025 SUMMER WORKSHOPS

By Carol VanOrnum

*“As always, we are eager to know what other Round Tables are doing regarding common concerns, especially sustaining and growing our membership and attracting active, engaged members. All the ideas and sharing are a big help to us as we proceed with our annual planning.”*

This was one reaction to the summer CWRT Congress workshops in Richmond and Cleveland. Participants from different CWRTs in both regions networked and participated with one another on how to grow, connect, and improve their Round Tables.

The opening ice breaker session provided attendees an opportunity to interact and share some of the challenges

they face, like topic fatigue, recruiting volunteers and board officers, and finding younger members.

Matt Callery, founder of the [\*Addressing Gettysburg Podcast\*](#), spoke of how social media utilized in different ways can promote and advertise Round Table meetings to attract a greater diversity in audiences.

He emphasized the importance of knowing your audience – their ideas and their preferences – and then determining what works for your own Round Table when reaching out to the greater community.

One attendee praised the *“excellent speakers who fully supported the focus of the Workshop.”* Drew Gruber, former CEO of [\*Civil War Trails\*](#), shared his

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Drew Gruber, former CEO of Civil War Trails



### Richmond, Virginia



## CWRT CONGRESS HOLDS 2025 SUMMER WORKSHOPS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6)

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experiences managing an organization. He posed the question: “What is your business model?” and suggested that CWRTs should develop a goal, determine their audience, and identify the basic necessities for growing. How are you marketing your Round Table to the community? In what ways are you recruiting new members? Once you get new members, what incentives are you offering to keep them? He added that Round Table leadership needs to listen to their members. “As a leader, don’t just push your perspective. Keep your eyes open. And if your Round Table is atrophying, look at why and make the changes. Think about how your

organization is perceived by the public.” He also emphasized using social media, i.e., Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, which are currently the best choices – and keep them up to date.

Chris Mackowski, co-founder of *Emerging Civil War* also emphasized social media and having a digital presence. “Facebook LIVE with a new member at a meeting,” he said before demonstrating a quick and easy way to ask a member on camera a few simple questions about how they heard about the Round Table, what they thought about the meeting, and will they be back?

He said in creating *Emerging Civil War*, one of the biggest challenges was establishing

legitimacy. This, he said, took careful crafting of content and contributors and Round Tables should seek to do the same.

Both Drew Gruber and Chris Mackowski emphasized establishing partnerships with other organizations and to imagine how both organizations can benefit. They suggested that finding younger members is a matter of going where they are. For example, hosting a Civil War trivia night at a local brewery, or booking and marketing younger speakers who will in turn attract a younger crowd. All these suggestions provided the Workshop attendees much food for thought. Many expressed an eagerness to return to their Round Tables to share ideas with their leadership and members.

**“If your Round Table is atrophying, look at why and make the changes.”**

**Drew Gruber  
Former CEO  
Civil War Trails**

### Cleveland, Ohio



## THE BRUNSWICK CWRT CELEBRATES THEIR 15TH ANNIVERSARY

By Chuck Roedema

It was in May 2010 that the Brunswick Civil War Round Table held its first meeting. With the planning and start-up phases completed, nervous anticipation prevailed. According to Civil War enthusiast and co-founder Wally Rueckel, "Tom O'Donnell, my good friend and co-founder in this new venture, had some concerns. Will people show up? Will they enjoy our first program? And, most importantly, will they return for future meetings?" Well, that first meeting was clearly a success. Over 50 people arrived at Trinity United Methodist Church in Southport to hear guest speaker, historian, and author Col. Black Jack Travis discuss "The Guns of Gettysburg." With a sigh of relief, meetings have continued on the first Tuesday of the month ever since, from September through May. And every month this fledgling organization grew and grew, eventually earning the envious reputation of being the largest Civil War Round Table in the country with 1,170 members, and that growth continues today.

Success was never guaranteed. But over time, one realization became clear; the success of this fast-growing organization would be attributed to a combination of exceptional speakers, effective communications, a committed Board of Directors and Advisors, and a strong and growing volunteer corps. Audiences were primarily interested in who will be speaking at the next meeting. So, guest



Founders Tom O'Donnell and Wally Rueckel

speakers became a top priority for success. They were selected for their focus on topics that were unique, diverse, and well beyond discussions of battles or tactics. Plus, they should reflect both North and South points of view, or said another way, no partiality. Speakers were renowned historians, authors, educators, and Civil War reenactors. Importantly, presentations would ideally be captivating and entertaining. No one enjoys a dull presentation.

Speakers in Civil War attire portraying Harriet Tubman, Abraham Lincoln, Generals A.P. Hill, William Tecumseh Sherman, and Ulysses S. Grant fascinated audiences. So did prominent speakers like "living national treasure" Ed Bearss, distinguished national historian James I. (Bud) Robertson, popular local historian and educator Chris Fonvielle, and Site Manager at Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site, Jim McKee to name just a few. Others would focus on rarely discussed topics

like Civil War communications, railroads, hospitals, logistics, naval battles, prisons, and Civil War heroes and battles that changed the course or outcome of the war. And, no one will ever forget Round Table Director Dr. Max Williams, Professor Emeritus at Western Carolina University, who took center stage at the May 7, 2013, meeting. Max made an impromptu presentation entitled, "Causes of the Civil War" without a note or visual aid when the planned guest speaker was a last minute "no-show." His audience was astonished by his knowledge of Civil War history and flawless delivery, earning him a resounding standing ovation!

Over the years, speakers proved time and time again to be the primary reason for membership growth. Beginning with initial hopes for success in 2010, to now boasting well over 1,100 members, this 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration takes on a very special meaning.

Membership loyalty over the years has been important. This proved to be the case during the September 2020 season when COVID forced meetings to be held virtually via Zoom. Despite a decline in members during that time when groups and audiences were discouraged or forbidden, some Civil War Round Tables could not sustain their membership and

had to disband. This Round Table resolved to stay the course, and membership has since rebounded beyond expectations. In fact, those Zoom presentations were so important, they continue to this day as an option for those who couldn't physically attend the meeting that evening.

Almost from the beginning, the Board of Directors and Advisors sensed they needed to meet the needs and expectations of its members to maintain their interest and involvement. A monthly newsletter, *Call to Arms*, was created. It began as a B/W publication emailed to all members. It has since become a colorful, comprehensive, multi-page newsletter to include news, updates, and future events. Over time, a Facebook page was created for Round Table news and updates. Also, an informative website allowing everyone to read about ongoing activities, upcoming events, speakers and their topics, and a huge photo gallery of past meetings was started. Periodic on-site tours are scheduled to

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## BRUNSWICK CWRT'S 15TH ANNIVERSARY (CONTINUED)

(Continued from Page 8)

various Civil War locations which are always well attended and informative. Another exclusive feature which began in 2013, and designed exclusively for the ladies, was appropriately called the "Civil War Ladies' Forum." It became an annual event featuring topics of particular interest to them. Male friends and husbands are not invited! These meetings have been attended by as many as one hundred ladies, both Brunswick Civil War Round Table members and the general public.

Another indication of the vitality and dynamics of this thriving non-profit organization is the enthusiasm of over 60 volunteers. They serve numerous meeting functions, such as greeters at the registration desk, manning the Sutlers and 50/50 tables, the new member sign-up desk, managing the A/V equipment and computer files, and the frequent additional needs that membership growth dictates.

"Giving back" is another goal that was established many years ago. It's giving back to the community, providing an annual scholarship to a worthy college student, or donations to the more than thirty non-profit organizations supporting Civil War preservation, museums, battlefields, and local historic sites. Funding comes from visitor fees of \$10 and the annual membership dues of \$25 which can include a spouse. Importantly, annual membership dues have not increased since the first meeting in 2010.

The Round Table's summer break occurs from June through August. But there is no break for those responsible for booking and confirming quality speakers for the coming season. Or ongoing communications with its comprehensive publicity network to reach members and the community about what lies ahead beginning in September. One speaker commitment is already booked for the Tuesday,

September 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting. The guest speaker will be Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. Actually, he is popular living historian Thomas Jesse, who portrays Lee. One thing is certain, his presentation will captivate and entertain his audience. This will be a dramatic way to kick off the new season and a meeting not to be missed. As a reminder, meetings are held on the first Tuesday of every month, except June through August.

Find us at [Brunswickcivil-warroundtable.com](http://Brunswickcivil-warroundtable.com).

*Chuck Roedema is Director of Communications and a member on the Board of Directors.*



## AMERICA250 AND THE CIVIL WAR

By David Hamon

By now, most of us have heard of the Semiquincentennial, or the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United States. While this observance is currently focused upon the Revolutionary War and our fight for independence, one can argue that the Civil War of 1861-1865 is an integral part of our nation's evolving history.

The Semiquincentennial Commission's website, <https://america250.org/americas-250th/> states as follows:

*"On July 4, 2026, our nation will commemorate and celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The journey toward this historic milestone is an opportunity to pause and reflect on our nation's past, honor the contributions of all Americans, and look ahead toward the future we want to create for the next generation and beyond."*

The America250 Handbook of the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), begins with what may be termed as the unfulfilled promise of our revolutionary beginnings as a nation. We Americans have been continually challenged to live up to our highest ideals, as expressed in our founding documents. Before, during, and after the Revolution, we fought for our rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and worked tirelessly to secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves

and our posterity. However, our history is not a consistent march of progress, but a complex story of achievements, advancements, and setbacks. These "histories" reveal the ways our Revolution began before 1776 and reverberates through to the present.

There is an historical straight line that begins before 1776 and runs through to 1860 when the dissolution of the Union plunged our nation into the most terrible of conflicts: a civil war. The plain fact is that without the Civil War and our efforts to preserve the Union, we would not be marking a commemoration event.

As leaders and members of Civil War Round Tables, we possess a unique opportunity to utilize the America250 initiative to reflect and celebrate upon the occasion of how the outcome of the Civil War served to preserve our Union. The singular impact of the outcome of the Civil War should serve as an enticement to recruit new Round Table members while retaining current members.

Here are a few suggestions for organizing the content, events, and activities to engage with our community partners to reflect upon the history of our nation and the efforts of the many Americans to preserve our Union.

- \* Plan activities that are interactive, hands-on, including Living History events to contribute to a sense of place and reflection.
- \* Invite the American Legion to join you in celebrating the 250<sup>th</sup>,



- \* Offer tours of special Civil War related sites to the public.
- \* Invite the youth and inspire them to embrace an interest in Civil War history.
- \* Invite the community to share their stories and extend the conversations to memories of those who served.
- \* Recruit story tellers to share soldiers' reflections (think of the Angel of Marye's Heights or the bayonet charge at Little Round Top).
- \* Gather in cemeteries, around statues, or in parks for commemorative activities.
- \* Set up information booths and network with educators and young students to promote history. Bring marketing materials to distribute.
- \* Relate how our great Civil War leaders were influenced by the Revolutionary War.

On March 4, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln reflected upon

the restoration of the Union with this evocative passage delivered during his second Inaugural Address:

*"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations."*

Let President Lincoln's message serve as an inspiration for our Round Tables to share the importance of the Civil War in bringing about the restoration of our nation.

*David Hamon is Membership Chair and serves on the Program Committee on the Board of CWRT of Fredericksburg and is also on the Board of the CWRT Congress.*

## SUN CITIES/SURPRISE, KNOXVILLE, AND OLD BALDY CWRTS RECEIVE 2025 CONGRESS AWARDS

By Carol VanOrnum

Three local Civil War Round Tables are being recognized by the CWRT Congress for their inspirational efforts to adapt, adopt, and establish strategies for sustainability.



The [Sun Cities/Surprise CWRT](#) will receive the 2025 [Dr. John Bamberl Phoenix Award](#). The *Phoenix Award* recognizes a Round Table for its restoration after a period of stagnation or extinction.

Prior to February 2022, the President of the Round Table suddenly passed, their Vice President fell seriously ill, their Secretary/Treasurer resigned, and Covid hit. They had no official organization left. But efforts by several members revived the Round Table leadership. Those sustaining members, plus a program chairperson, stepped forward, encouraging members and visitors to bring friends to meetings. They established a chapter Facebook page to publicize programs. In this year, their goal is to invite history teachers to join the Round Table, both as presenters and attendees. In addition, their

current Vice President sits on the Board of the Scottsdale CWRT, recognized as their sister organization.

CWRT Congress Vice President John Bamberl will present the *Phoenix Award* to Round Table President Dan Lookabill on October 7, 2025.



The [Knoxville CWRT](#) will receive the [Wallace L. Rueckel Innovation Award](#) for their multiple innovative efforts. The *Innovation Award* recognizes a Round Table for creative, effective, and inventive programs that provide value to the members. The Knoxville CWRT has certainly achieved innovative success in several ways.

They eliminated their expensive and ineffective method of advertising their annual Living History weekend and instead placed signage and posters where people gather. That alternative method has proved to be successful. They created a Vision and Planning Committee, realizing that strategies can't be effective unless goals, objectives, and action plans are developed to achieve them. Several committees formed – Special Projects, Genealogy, Community Outreach, and others – to engage both the

Board and members. The Community Outreach Committee has been especially successful in establishing ways to work together with museums, county historical societies, civil groups, and the JROTC.

The Round Table established their role in assisting the City with the preservation and interpretation of the Battlefield of Armstrong Hill (November 25, 1863). They continue to expand their participation in this collaboration.

CWRT Congress Vice President Carol VanOrnum will present the *Innovation Award* to Round Table President Tim Vane on September 9, 2025.



The [Old Baldy CWRT](#) will receive the 2025 [Matthew Borowick Marketing Award](#) for their successful marketing of their Round Table. The *Marketing Award* recognizes a Round Table for presenting itself to members, enthusiasts, community partners, potential supporters, and others by using a variety of methods and channels.

President Paul Prentess shares that historical data collected

about their organization is utilized and distributed in many ways. In particular, the data is part of their grant application process to the Camden County Cultural and Heritage Commission. OBCWRT maintains relevance through articles about their outreach efforts in the CWRT Congress' *Light Post* as well as publishing other articles and announcements, all which are distributed nationwide and/or to several local New Jersey history publications. They also partner with several historical societies and volunteer organizations.

OBCWRT's newsletter has twice won the Kevin H. Hale Award for best Historical Newsletter in New Jersey. OBCWRT also has a YouTube channel to simulcast and record their monthly meetings, which can be accessed nationally and internationally. They also produce flyers and rack cards to distribute at every opportunity.

Matthew Borowick will present the *Marketing Award* to President Paul Prentess on November 13, 2025.

By the recognition of these three Round Tables for their successes at restoration, innovation and marketing, the CWRT Congress encourages all local Round Tables to emulate these exemplary efforts in order to enhance their own growth and sustainability.

## THE GHOSTS OF GETTYSBURG

By Jared Peatman, Ph.D.

For tourists visiting Gettysburg, especially those with tweens or teens, a ghost tour is a rite of passage. Excited visitors can choose from one of Mark Nesbitt's three different Ghosts of Gettysburg options, a Grave Digger Tour, or ones that offer ghost-detecting equipment. There is even a "Gettysburg Paranormal Association," showing the popularity of the topic. There are half-dozen or so centered on Gettysburg College, and when I was a student there in the late 1990s and early 2000s, I enjoyed sharing a few of them with school groups who were visiting the battlefield.

Perhaps the most well-known was the story of two college administrators and their encounter with ghosts in Penn Hall, a tale that featured on *Unsolved Mysteries* in 1996. Penn Hall had been used as a hospital during the battle, first for John Buford's cavalry division and then by the Confederates after they captured the town. During renovations in the 1930s workers discovered bones in the earth outside the building, evincing its use for amputations. The ghost story goes that late one night the two colleagues entered the building's elevator destined for the first floor, but that it kept going to the basement whereupon the doors opened to reveal a Civil War hospital scene. After a few minutes, the elevator returned the modern-day humans to the

main floor, and they soon reported what they had seen to the College's head of security.

Penn Hall is capped with a beautiful cupola, and during the battle Confederate sentries stood watch from that vantage point. College Professor Michael Jacobs, author of the first book on the battle, even claimed that Robert E. Lee ascended to the Cupola to view the field, a notion which is disputed by many. Today, ghost aficionados claim that while the College's clocktower chimes twelve times for midnight you can "see" the Confederate sentry pacing around the Cupola. In 1999 or perhaps 2000 I brought a group of fifth graders out at precisely midnight to determine if we could see the sentry. I stipulated that the students had to keep their gazes on the ground

as we approached the building and could only look up once the clock began to chime. It was a misty, breezy night, and the flag flying from the Cupola was moving in the wind. The students all claimed to have seen the sentry, and maybe they did.

At the time of the Battle of Gettysburg there were three substantial buildings on Gettysburg's campus. Penn Hall (or Old Dorm) and the president's house still stand, while Linnaean Hall was dismantled in the mid-twentieth century and the ground where it once stood is now just a lawn. But, the ghost story goes, because of the bloodshed and death in the building in early July of 1863, Linnaean Hall "returns" during the battle

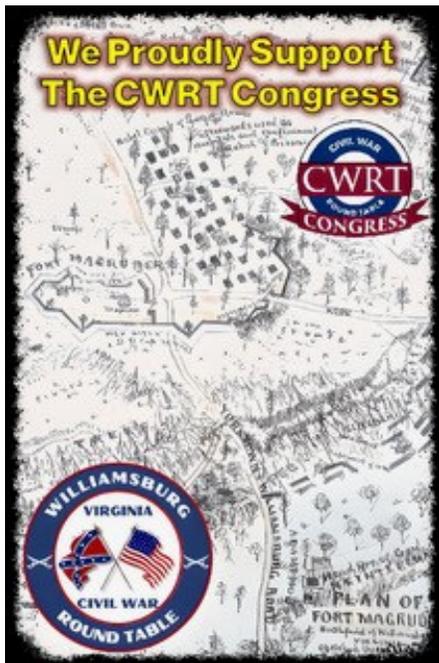
anniversary and the outline is etched in the ground in blood. In July of 2008 I saw this phenomenon and captured an image of the ghost building. There is, of course, a logical explanation for what you see in this photo, but it's more fun to suspend your disbelief and believe in ghosts, even for a moment.

*Jared Peatman, Ph.D., has recently completed a book on the 20th Maine that he began as a pre-teen. In his day job Jared is the founder of Four Score Consulting, a small company that provides history themed leadership development events. He is a Board Director of the CWRT Congress. He doesn't always write about serious stuff.*

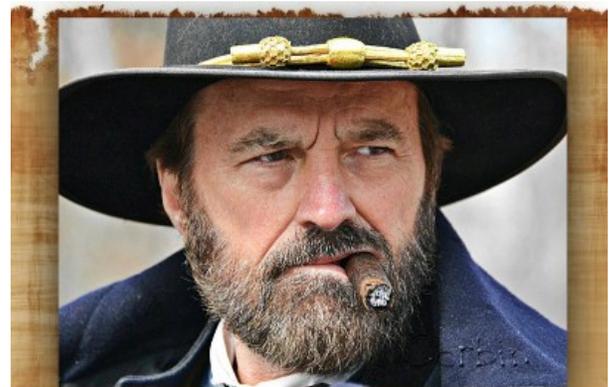


Linnaean Hall location on the campus of Gettysburg College.

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Portrayed by

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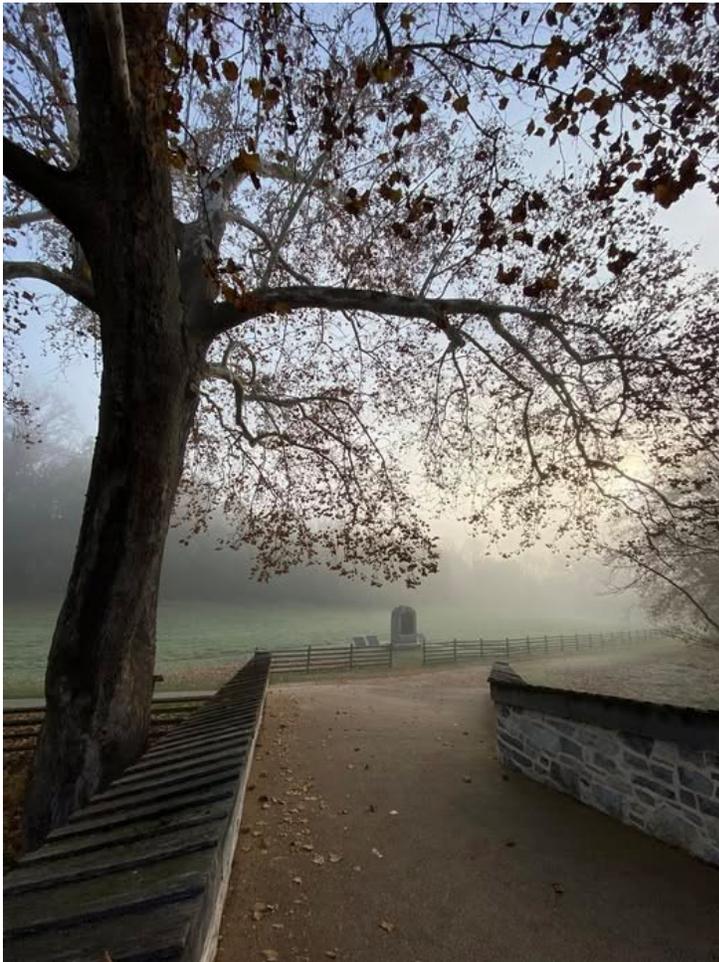
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**A MONUMENTAL WITNESS**

Recognized as a "Witness Tree," this large Sycamore standing next to the Lower Bridge (Burnside Bridge) over Antietam Creek was only around twenty feet high during the battle in September 1862. Union General Ambrose Burnside's name has also become linked with this living monument. . Photo: <https://matthewholzman.picfair.com/>, Civil-warscapes on Facebook

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