



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
January 2022, Volume 19, Issue 1

Speaker: Steve Norder
Topic: A Week with Lincoln: Lincoln Takes Command
When: Monday January 10, 2022
Location: Brock's Riverside Grill
Times: Social Time Begins 6:00 pm, Dinner 6:45 pm, Meeting Begins 7:30 pm
Our Website: www.rappvalleycivilwar.org
Our Facebook: www.facebook.com/rvcwrt

JANUARY 10th MEETING CHANGE

We will not be meeting in-person at Brock's on January 10, 2022 as scheduled. Due to health, safety and staffing concerns amid a worsening COVID situation, we will be presenting our January presentation via ZOOM. We hope to have our scheduled speaker, Steve Norder, present "Lincoln Takes Command." This is subject to change. For further details, contact us at rappcwevents21@gmail.com.

Please make dinner reservations through John Sapanara via email rappcwevents21@gmail.com or by phone 540-479-1299. He will contact you with confirmation. Please reserve by the Thursday before the Monday dinner meeting date. If you wish to be placed on the "permanent reservation" list, please advise John. Members on this list do not need to make reservations every month - their attendance is assumed unless they cancel beforehand. Member dinner price is **\$30**. This price also applies to non-member attendees who join at the meeting, or to guests invited by members. Non-member dinner price is \$35.

THANK YOU

Thanks to all our members for their support, generosity and patience during this eventful year. We are looking forward to 2022...when the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table celebrates its 33rd anniversary! Here are some reminders:

Our website is www.rappvalleycivilwar.org. Monthly speakers and programs are listed here through December 2022.

Our Facebook page is www.facebook.com/rvcwrt. This page is updated daily.

Our YouTube channel can be accessed by searching "rvcwrt" on YouTube. Ten Civil War-themed Zoom programs, produced during the pandemic shutdown, are available here. We are also experimenting with adding recordings of our live programs to this channel. Two recent presentations, Doug Crenshaw's Seven Days Battles and John Kanaster's Fredericksburg's Bloody Plain, are available now.

The email address for dinner and activity reservations is rappcwevents21@gmail.com. This address can also be used for general inquiries/comments and to contact members of our Executive Committee. You can also reach us through the "Contact Us" function on our website. Dinners are scheduled at Brock's Riverside Grill on the second Monday of the month. Please make dinner reservations by the Thursday before our Monday meeting date.

In 2021, we resumed live dinner programs at Brock's beginning in June. We funded a summer internship at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park and opened our meetings to all Park Service interns at no cost.

We donated over \$1100 to the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust to support local preservation and acquisition projects. We assisted Historic Fredericksburg Foundation Inc. with administration of conservation easements in Orange and Spotsylvania Counties. We received a portion of donations from the easement landowners to help fund our programs.

DINNER MEETING NOTES

We will continue to award two door prizes - \$50 gift certificates to Brock's Riverside Grill – at every meeting. Every dinner attendee receives a complimentary ticket and is automatically entered into the drawing. Used books contributed by members will now be available for a donation of your choosing – no raffle tickets needed. A “free’ table near the stairway will usually have a variety of magazines, pamphlets, ephemera and books in lesser condition. Notices of events and other items of Civil War interest will be posted on bulletin boards across from the "free" table.

“Steve Norder: A Week with Lincoln: Lincoln Takes Command”

Steve Norder has worked as a teacher, newspaper reporter and book editor, but the Civil War has been his abiding interest since his childhood in Iowa. That interest only deepened when he moved south more than 35 years ago and realized how learning about that period of history is essential to understanding forces still shaping events today. That spurred him to undertake detailed research on the war, particularly on aspects overlooked or forgotten. His work has appeared in the *Civil War Times Illustrated* and *Civil War News*. *Lincoln Takes Command* is his first book. After years living in Louisiana, then Texas, he now lives in Georgia, where he is a member of the Atlanta Civil War Round Table.

"It was difficult to know [Abraham Lincoln] without knowing him intimately, for he was as guileless and single-hearted as a child; and no man ever knew him intimately who did not recognize and admire his great abilities, both natural and acquired, his large-heartedness and sincerity of purpose ..."

Egbert L. Viele based his post-war description of Lincoln on the week he spent with the president during a visit to Hampton Roads, Virginia. It was a week -- May 5-12, 1862 -- that Viele and others had a chance to see Lincoln not only as a president of the United States, but as a neophyte military commander setting strategic objectives, and as a compassionate but strong person. My talk, "A Week with Lincoln," highlights how those who came into contact with the president saw him.

During that May trip, Lincoln, along with two cabinet secretaries and Viele, then a brigadier general, orchestrated a military campaign. The goal was to capture the Confederate cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth as well as the Gosport Navy Yard. In so doing, the president hoped the feared ironclad, *CSS Virginia*, could be destroyed.

Through firm suggestions and polite requests, Lincoln moved his military commanders -- both navy and army -- into action to accomplish his goals. These actions included sending Union vessels up the James River toward Richmond, bombarding a Confederate fort guarding the approach to Norfolk and landing a small army on a Virginia Beach for a march to capture the city. This led to the destruction of the *CSS Virginia* by her own crew.

Numerous people, including newspaper reporters, watched, talked with and interacted with Lincoln. Some of them wrote their observations that day or soon after, while others wrote about him after the war. But it was obvious that he had an impact on those he met during that important week in Lincoln's presidency.

“The Battle of Fredericksburg: Bloody Plain Revealed”

by John Kanaster

A Review of the December 2021 Program by Greg Mertz

John Kanaster, proprietor of Fredericksburg Tours, used an analogy with the story of the Titanic to illustrate the way in which many people view the battle of Fredericksburg. When thinking of both of these landmarks in history, catastrophe and death come to mind. The story of the Titanic is one in which the most obvious danger was literally only the “tip of the iceberg,” with a very significant portion of the hazard unseen under the water. The story of Fredericksburg often focuses on the slim green strip of land preserved by the National Park Service along the Sunken Road and Marye’s Heights with other critical portions of the battlefield being overlooked.

One of the often-unnoticed landmarks of the Fredericksburg battlefield is the Bloody Plain in front of the Sunken Road, where from 11 am to 6 pm the Union army suffered 1,000 casualties per hour. Though many visitors are bothered that a neighborhood was built on top of the battlefield, John pointed out that there is still a great deal to discover of the Bloody Plain, and much of his program focused on what current locations were related to Civil War era landmarks, and how those 1862 features impacted the battle.

In the 1850s Fredericksburg witnessed several projects designed to improve the city's prosperity. In order to compete with other Virginia cities built on the fall line of major rivers, such as Alexandria and Richmond, Fredericksburg looked to the west for potential commerce. The Orange Turnpike and its successor the Orange Plank Roads, stretched west from Fredericksburg to reach clientele. Today, this road in downtown Fredericksburg is William Street. Together with Gordon's Marsh to the north of the thoroughfare, these landmarks delineated the north edge of what would become the Bloody Plain.

The bed of the yet unfinished Fredericksburg and Gordonsville Railroad and Hazel Run to the south of the future rail line defined the south boundary of the plain. This rail trace has recently been converted into a biking and running trail.

A millrace, often called a "canal" was constructed to provide water power to potentially turn the giant mill wheels generating the energy to drive any number of industries. It was fifteen feet wide, 5-6 feet deep, with about three feet of water in it at the time of the battle. This man-made watercourse, currently running underneath much of today's Kenmore Avenue marked the eastern side of the plain butting up against the stonewall lining the Sunken Road to the west.

Three bridges spanned the millrace at William, Hanover and Prussia (now Lafayette) Streets. Prior to the battle, the Confederates pulled up the planking from these bridges, but left the stringers in place so Union troops would still be drawn to the slight benefit provided by these beams, and the Confederates could still concentrate their firepower at Union troops bunched up at those three points. With the depth of the millrace being just over the average height of a man, it was not possible for a man who jumped into the millrace to pull himself back up without great difficulty. It took 20-30 minutes

for a brigade to cross the millrace. Once across to the west side of the watercourse, the blue-clad troops went from marching in column of fours into line of battle

In the middle of the plain was a ten-acre fairground called Mercer Square, surrounded by a fence. A group of investors making up a who's who of Fredericksburg's prominent citizens – Rowe, Hall, Goolrick, Jennings and Caldwell – purchased the ground surrounding the fairground and plotted out the neighborhood that has grown up since the Civil War. Accordingly, roads formed on the outside of the Mercer Square fence, today delineated on the north side by Mercer Street, the east side by Weedon Street, the south side by an alley between Wolfe Street and Lafayette Boulevard and on the west side by Shepherd Street. The Confederates pulled down the fence on the west side of Mercer Square so they could have a clear view of the Yankees crossing the fairground, but they left the fence on the east side as an obstacle, and left the north and south fences in place to compartmentalize the battlefield. Leaving the fences north and south of the fairgrounds hampered coordination of troops who could not easily see nor easily take position alongside men separated from each other by a fence.

Four substantial buildings stretched between Hanover Street and to a point near the northwest corner of Mercer Square along what is today's Littlepage Street. The structure closest to the fairgrounds still stands – the Stratton House. The Stratton wheelwright shop and blacksmith shop were between the Stratton home and modern Kirkland Street. In the wedge between Kirkland and Hanover Street stood the Sisson Store, which actually looked very similar to the Sunken Well Tavern currently standing at that location. Just west of the Stratton buildings was their orchard and a fence on the west side of their lot that ran along where Freeman Street runs today. Kanaster made the analogy of the wheelwright shop and the store being the filling station and convenience stores of their day for travelers coming in and out of town from that direction.

Whereas the Confederates pulled down the fence on the west side of the fairgrounds in order to have a great field of fire, they did not tear down the fence just to the north in rear of the Stratton buildings. Kanaster surmised that the cover provided by the four buildings and the fence may have played a role in allowing some of the regiments to get closer to the stone wall than

units attacking across the center of the fairgrounds. Two brigades in Winfield S. Hancock's division attacked through the Stratton/Sisson buildings and his 69th New York and 5th New Hampshire were among the regiments to claim the honor of advancing further than other regiments.

The units often applied differing criteria in asserting their distinctions. The 69th New York proclaimed that the officer to be killed closest to the stone wall was from their regiment, and the 5th New Hampshire, which hurled their flag like a javelin over the Stratton fence, professed their colors made it closest to the terrible stone wall. Remnants of the failed assaults sought protection by lying in a swale – a slight dip in the ground -- still evident just east of modern Littlepage Street.

Kanaster said that the Bloody Plain became “a challenge of history and memory.” The discussion of who got closest to the stone wall as an admission of Union failure. Often opposing sides argued who won or who lost, but there was no doubt regarding the outcome of the fighting on the Bloody Plain. Union losses on the Bloody Plain neared 8,000 while the Confederates on Marye's Heights and behind the stone wall lost a little more than 1,000 men. But the discussion of who got closest to the stone wall practically became “a gauge to judge a person's sense of duty.”

Although the outcome of the fighting on the Bloody Plain was likely determined fairly early in the battle, the fighting continued with what would be the fifth, sixth and seventh Union attacks. Burnside saw the need to maintain the initiative on the Bloody Plain both as support for the main attack four miles to the south at Prospect Hill, as well as to prevent the Confederates from launching a counterattack on the shattered Union forces scattered across the plain.

John Turner

We are sorry to report that our long-time member and friend John Turner passed away on December 10th after a long illness. John was a native Virginian, a Navy pilot and a 747 Captain for United Airlines. Most of all, he was a true gentleman who loved God, family and country. John's full obituary may be found at:

<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/fredericksburg/name/john-turner-obituary?id=31862127>

Civil War Round Table of Fredericksburg (CWRTF) Schedule

CWRTF, our sister round table, meets 9 times a year on designated Wednesdays at Mary Washington Jepson Alumni Executive Center, 1119 Hanover Street. Reservations are required. Further details can be found on their website at CWRTF.org

JANUARY 26, 2022 – CIVIL WAR ORDNANCE - Col(R) John Biemeck

FEBRUARY 23, 2022 – SEASON OF SLAUGHTER: THE BATTLE OF SPOTSYLVANIA COURT HOUSE - Chris Mackowski

MARCH 23, 2022 – THE PRESIDENCY OF ULYSSES S. GRANT - Dr. Paul Kahan

APRIL 27, 2022 – BURYING THE DEAD BUT NOT THE PAST: THE LADIES MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION - Dr. Caroline Janney

Who We Are

The Drum and Bugle Newsletter is published monthly by the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table, Post Office Box 7632, Fredericksburg VA 22404. The newsletter is available on our website at www.rappvalleycivilwar.org. Yearly membership dues are \$35 for individuals and \$45 for families. Membership is open to anyone interested in the military, political and social history of the American Civil War.

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