



THE DRUM & BUGLE
Voice of the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table
Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table Newsletter
June 2020, Volume 17, Issue 6

Speaker:

Topic:

When:

Location: Brock's Riverside Grill

Times: Social Begins 6:00 pm, Dinner 6:45 pm, Meeting Begins 7:30 p.m.

“No Meeting in May or June”

Based on guidance/orders from federal, state, and local governments and health authorities, RVCWRT is canceling or postponing all scheduled activities through at least June 10, 2020. This includes dinner meetings on May 11 and June 8 (canceled) and the May 16 bus trip (postponed until further notice). Paid bus trip participants will be contacted individually regarding refunds. Ed Bearss will not

be speaking to us as scheduled in July due to health and safety concerns. Please continue to visit our website periodically for any updates. The Executive Committee hopes everyone remains safe and healthy during this difficult time.

"Music of the Civil War "
by Geoff White

A Review of the May 2020 Virtual Program by Greg Mertz

"The Final form of the program in its most polished and recommended version, can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=en-sgtuJZZc>" Geoff presented the songs in two different ways. He either played the tunes on his 19th century fiddle, or he sang the songs as he strung on his guitar. He also provided historical context for the melodies, and because of the nature of this combination talk and musical performance, this review will focus on what he said, even though his music comprised the vast majority of the program.

White pointed out that many of the same songs were very popular in the camps of both armies, though the northern and southern soldiers each changed the lyrics to suite their particular cause. The number "Rally 'Round the Flag" was one such popular tune, with the first line of the refrain for Federal soldiers being "Huzzah for the Union" while their counterparts in Confederate army sang "Our Dixie forever" instead.

One of the most prominent composers of the period was Stephen Foster. Geoff said that his musical influence on the era could not be overstated. He called Foster the "Bob Dylan of the era" because he was able to bring songs to audiences that otherwise would have never heard the music. Foster's popular song "Hard Times Come Again No More," gained particular relevance to the soldiers because the prevalent bread ration was a large, tough cracker appropriately called "Hard Tack." Since the cracker was not particularly well liked by most of the men, the lyrics "Hard Tack Come Again No More" seemed apropos to the soldiers.

However, some soldiers in the 1st Iowa had a different take on the subject and had their own version of the lyrics. During the Wilson's Creek campaign in the

summer of 1861, there was a shortage of hard tack, so the men had to eat a corn meal mush they derogatorily called “horse feed” in their version of the song, and sang a chorus of “Hard Tack Come Again Once More.”

Some of the songs of the Civil War are still popular today. Elvis Presley modernized a Civil War era tune called “Aura Lee” written by George Poulton for his hit “Love Me Tender.”

The Civil War movie “Cold Mountain” brought attention back to a song from the era, only giving it a more enchanting name. The movie’s song “Ruby with the Eyes that Sparkle” was actually the Civil War era’s “Shove that Pig’s Foot a Little Further into the Fire.”

Irish music – jigs and reels -- had a prominent influence on the melodies of the Civil War era. Jigs had three beats, while reels had four beats.

Just as people have accents of how they talk relative to where they are from and their particular heritage, so music also has an accent, and one can hear those influences in the songs. White is from the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina and he was raised on Cajun music as well as Rock and Roll – styles of music which both have steady back beats. He played us his version of “Yankee Doodle” on the fiddle to demonstrate his accent. “Yankee Doodle” was a song of the Revolutionary War era, but Civil War soldiers on both sides sang and related to the song as they both felt they were following in the patriotic tradition of their forefathers of the American Revolution. They also sang patriot songs of the War of 1812, including “Old 1812” which could frequently be heard on actual Civil War battlefields, with the fife and drum corps playing it as the troops maneuvered.

Another song of the War of 1812 era, known as “Bonaparte’s Retreat” contained lyrics about the rout of the tyrant, which during the Civil War was shrouded to pertain to Lincoln. It is well-known to us today for its use in an advertising campaign for beef. After Geoff played the song on the fiddle, he declared that any one who said “Beef – it’s what’s for dinner” owes him a nickel.

Besides soldiers adapting the words of popular songs to match with their situations during the Civil War, as with “Hard Times Come Again No More,” prominent melodies were often given completely different sets of lyrics. Julia Ward Howe heard some soldiers singing “John Brown’s Body” during the winter of 1861-62. She liked the melody, but did not like the morbid words, of the body “moldering in the grave.” She instead applied uplifting lyrics,

creating what White called “this apocalyptic vision of the armies of the Lord marching across the nation and bringing freedom to a race of people” in what has possibly become the most recognized Civil War song of the North -- the “Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

Minstrel Songs were performed by white people wearing black face. The performances were purposely meant to diminish, dehumanized and ridicule the intelligence of people of African descent. Historically it is important to look at the past “unvarnished” White stated, and to know that this practice we recognize as very offensive today, was very popular and accepted at the time. The song “Year of the Jubilo” told a story from the point of view of the slave telling of Lincoln’s gunboats coming down the river to the plantations, as the masters ran off, and the slaves celebrated. Another song about the Union army bringing freedom to the enslaved as they trekked through the South is “Marching Through Georgia.”

Stephen Foster brought minstrel songs to a more respectable and acceptable status. Songs were written with the idea that they would be sold as sheet music and simple enough for an amateur musician to be able to play the song. The songs were to appeal more to the person who would *play* the music than to the person who would be *listening* to the song. Many of the songs told of the difficulty of slavery, and the phrase of being sent “down river” came with the understanding that work was harder the further downstream on the Mississippi River a slave was sent. “Old Susannah” is about a slave who was sold down river to New Orleans, where the work was the worst that slave labor could get.

Ironically the song that is currently most associated with the Civil War is one that has no connection with the era at all. But “Ashoken Farewell” was prominently utilized in the Ken Burns documentary of the Civil War and many people request that it be played, referring to it simply as “that Civil War song.”

Ongoing Reminder

Please contact Bob Jones to order your dinner in advance or to confirm your dinner reservation. Please call Bob Jones @ 540-399-1702 or send him your e-mail at cwrtedinner@yahoo.com.

REMINDER: Beginning in 2020, dinner will be \$26 for members and \$30 for non-members.

The Civil War Round Table of Fredericksburg By Bob Jones

As a courtesy, the RVCWRT provides as a regular feature each month, the ongoing scheduled speakers for the CWRTF's 2020 Program Year. The Civil War Round Table of Fredericksburg normally meets on the fourth Wednesday of every month, except for one meeting held on the third Wednesday of June 2020. Dinner Meetings are held at the UMW's Jepson Center located at:

[1119 Hanover Street, Fredericksburg, VA](#)

Dinner cost is \$32.00 per person.

Advance reservations should be made by email: dinner@cwrtf.org or telephone: 540-361-2105.

CWRTF's All Activities Cancelled Through May 2020:

--	--	--



**Reprint of a write up done by Mac Wyckoff of Jim Morgan's Sixties
Music: The Songs of the American Civil War**

There have been many exceptional programs during the 30+ year history of our Round Table. Jim Morgan's presentation in 2002, described below by Mac Wyckoff, was one of them. We are highlighting some of these treasures from the past while we look toward a brighter future.

**Sixties Music: The Songs of the American Civil War by Jim Morgan
June 2002, Program Reviewed by Mac Wyckoff**

Civil War soldiers spent relatively little time in combat. Rather, the majority of their time was spent on the march and in camp. One of the popular camp activities was playing musical instruments and singing. At our June meeting, Jim Morgan greatly entertained us with a program on music of the Civil War era. He sang and played the guitar and discussed eleven songs.

Mr. Morgan first enjoined those present to put on their 19th-century ears, since during the Civil War people made their own music. He began with a familiar song written by Harry McCarthy, "the Bob Hope of the Civil War," who was from Arkansas. This song, "The Bonnie Blue Flag," was about a pre-war banner with a single star seen most often in Mississippi. The lone star symbolized a state's willingness to leave the Union and go it alone, essentially as a separate republic, to preserve its rights. This was what some Southern states did briefly before joining the Confederacy. Morgan emphasized that "The Bonnie Blue Flag" was considered a hard-core political statement, and was actually banned in some parts of the North. "The Bonnie Blue Flag" was the real anthem of the Confederacy, not "Dixie," which was never banned in the North.

Mr. Morgan's second song was "The Battle Cry of Freedom," which had a similar impact in the North to that of "The Bonnie Blue Flag" in the South. "Battle Cry" was one of about 200 war songs written by George Root, who ran a Chicago music store. It was a very patriotic song written for a rally to enlist men in response to President Lincoln's second call for volunteers, this time 300,000, early in the war. The emotional appeal of the song effectively convinced large numbers of young Northerners to enlist. Morgan recounted an anecdote told by a Confederate officer who heard Union troops singing "The

"Battle Cry of Freedom" just before the Battle of Malvern Hill, at a time when they should have been demoralized; the way they sang made the Southerner realize that these men were still full of fight, and that it would be a long war.

The next two songs were 1860 political campaign songs. One was associated with the John C. Breckinridge - Joseph Lane Democratic ticket, and contained very interesting lyrics. The second was an adaptation of the folk song "Rosin the Bow" called "Lincoln and Liberty." The lyrics identify Lincoln as the "Pride of the Suckers." The word "sucker" in 1860 was short for "prairie sucker," and referred to men who sucked (or brought forth) life from the earth, in other words farmers. Therefore, it was a complimentary rather than derogatory phrase symbolizing Lincoln as a man of the people.

Mr. Morgan then sang two well-known songs that are not about what they might at first appear to be. "The Yellow Rose of Texas," like many popular songs of the Civil War, was written prior to the war as a minstrel tune. The words "yellow rose" referred to a mulatto woman, not a plant. The verse "No other soldier knows her" originally contained the word "darker." Mr. Morgan told an anecdote about the Texans having won the Battle of San Jacinto because Mexican General Santa Anna was dallying with a mulatto woman named Emily Morgan, and was literally caught with his pants down. Mr. Morgan added a personal touch but stating that his family at the time had owned a plantation on Louisiana's Red River and had owned a slave named Emily who had run away; they always thought she might have been the "Yellow Rose."

It turns out that "John Brown's Body" is not about the abolitionist who led the attempted slave revolt at Harpers Ferry in 1859. Instead, it was written by the glee club of the 12th Massachusetts Regiment about one of their members, a sergeant who died of illness early in the war. The tune is an old Methodist camp-meeting song. Later, verses were added that referred to the other, more famous John Brown, and to Jefferson Davis and a sour apple tree. The song was so popular in the North that Mr. Morgan suggested that if there had been a top-40 pop songs chart during the war, this song would have been number one for many weeks. He also noted that the 12th Massachusetts was called the Hallelujah Regiment and also the Webster Regiment, because Daniel Webster's son Fletcher was its first colonel.

One of the more haunting songs of the war was "Lorena." It began as a poem written about 1855 by an Ohio clergyman named Henry Webster about an old flame named Bertha whom he'd loved and lost early in life. The poem was later set to music and the name changed to Lorena because the made-up

name fit better with the music. In the postwar era, there were many girls named Lorena. This was the Victorian era, with people very expressive of their emotions.

Another poem written by a Union soldier that was turned into a song was "The Vacant Chair." The poem paid tribute to 18-year-old John William Grout, a lieutenant in the 15th Massachusetts, who escaped capture after the Battle of Ball's Bluff in November 1861 by swimming across the Potomac River near Leesburg. He bravely returned to aid others, but was shot as he swam back across the river. His body washed ashore at Haines Point in Washington, D.C., several weeks later. Young Grout had been made an officer at the age of 17 because he had attended a military high school and knew how to drill troops. He should have been his regiment's officer of the day at Ball's Bluff, but switched duties with another officer so that he could be with his men. In effect, his valor cost him his life. Since the lyrics did not mention what side the soldier fought for, the song was popular in-both armies.

A more light-hearted offering was "The Invalid Corps," which pokes fun at the members of the Veterans Volunteer Corps, which was thought to be a haven for slackers who were never able to fight. Mr. Morgan then turned to a song that he said he has played in every one of his presentations, "Dixie." What is now recognized as the song of the Confederacy was written by a Northern minstrel show performer named Dan Emmett two years before the war. Originally, it was intended to be performed at the end of a musical show as a number called a "walk-around," in which the entire cast comes out on stage for a spirited finale. The line "I wish I was in the land of cotton" originally symbolized a Northern performer's desire to be in a warmer climate during the winter touring season. This was an ambiguous phrase early in the war. Southerners interpreted it to mean the land they lived in and loved. Northerners interpreted it to signify a desire for Union victory. For the first half of the war, the song was therefore popular among soldiers on both sides. But by late 1862 or early 1863, it had become a Southern song that was rarely heard in the Northern camps. "Dixie" was never the official Confederate national anthem, although everybody thinks so; "dixies" were 10-dollar bank notes issued by a bank in New Orleans, with the value indicated in French to accommodate the local Creoles. After the war, "Dixie" rather than "The Bonnie Blue Flag" became recognized as the song of the Confederacy.

Mr. Morgan ended with another George Root song popular in both camps was "Just Before the Battle, Mother," since it also did not mention which side the

soldier fought for. The song covers much emotional ground in expressing the soldier's courage, patriotism, and loneliness. Mr. Morgan accompanied himself on the guitar, but noted that the men who sang these songs in the 1860s would have used a banjo. Armies often serenaded each other, first one side and then the other offering a song. Such songs are familiar to Civil War students and buffs, but the stories behind the tunes are largely obscure. Mr. Morgan brought to life the songs and stories in a highly entertaining fashion.

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. Each month, The Drum and Bugle newsletter is also placed on our web-site, www.RVCWRT.org. Yearly membership dues are \$35.00 for an individual, \$45.00 for families, and only \$7.50 for students. Membership is open to anyone interested in the study of the Civil War and the ongoing preservation of Civil War sites.

The RVCWRT Executive Committee:

President:	John Sapanara	Member at Large:	Robin Donato
Vice President/Membership:	Paul Stier	Member at Large:	John Griffiths
Secretary:	Melanie Jordan	Member at Large:	Barbara Stafford
Treasurer:	Ben Keller	Media & Events Coordinator:	Paul Stier
Asst. Treasurer:	Jay Oakley	Past President:	Bob Jones
Scribe:	Greg Mertz	Newsletter Editor & Webmaster:	Sarah Fey