

THE SHARPSHOOTER

THE CIVIL WAR FORUM OF METROPOLITAN NEW YORK

February 2011



Cost:

Members: \$40

Non-Members: \$50

Date:

Feb. 16, 2011

Place:

The Roger Smith Hotel,
507 Lexington Ave.,
16th floor "Solarium"

Time:

Dinner at 6 PM,

Doors open 5:30 PM

Cash Bar 5:30–6 PM

Please call 212-534-0149

by Feb. 13th

to confirm you will be attending.

Lou McElwee

Born in Hot Springs, Virginia 1946, our February speaker Lou McElwee, whose topic is “Braxton Bragg, Jefferson Davis, and the Confederate failure of command in the West,” has some illustrious ancestors. On his mother’s side he’s a triple descendant pilgrims on the *Mayflower* (one pilgrim relative was Richard Warren, from whom US Grant and Franklin Roosevelt are also direct descendants). Lou also had ancestors in the Union Army. On his father’s side, his people arrived in Virginia in the 1770s and Lou’s grandfather fought in the Confederate Army. Inspired to read history by his third and fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Hoover, in a school with two grades in each room and no indoor plumbing. Mrs. Hoover was upset that by the end of 4th grade Lou was a US Grant Union man and he remains one to this day.

Lou never went beyond two years of high school in Virginia, and two years in Ocean City, NJ, but he has read history (not just about the Civil War) since the third grade. Living in New York City since 1968, Lou visits Grant’s Tomb almost every Sunday.

Speakers 2011

March 16: Jaime Malanowski, “Was the Civil War Inevitable?”

April 13: (*Note unusual date*): Col. Ty Seidule, “Gentlemen or Traitors? West Point’s Memory of Robert E. Lee and the Confederate Generals”



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Our January meeting once again demonstrated that we are making a difference in our approach to learning about the history of America's Civil War. Members Nathan Burkan, Lou McElwee, and Paul Windels offered thoughtful, well-researched views on various "What ifs" of the Civil War. Even better was the thought-provoking Question and Answer discussion.

It all sent home to all the point that we are a member-driven organization of people who love the study of history and enjoy the opportunity to join people of like interest in a once-a-month social and educational gathering.

If you have an idea for a meeting or would like to make a presentation, please contact Jackie Eberstein at jeberstein@controlcarb.com. If you have some thoughts on how to make our Forum a more enjoyable member experience, please let me know at DavidMKinard@aol.com.

To keep our club the vibrant, fun place it is, we need to have a constant stream of new members! I ask each of you to consider inviting one of your history buff friends (not *necessarily* Civil War) to come to a meeting as your guest. I will then ask all of our members to charm them into joining our Club. We do need everyone's help to get new people interested. Fortunately, with it being the sesquicentennial of the war we will be getting a lot of free publicity, but we need all of you to jump on this opportunity.

Regards,
David Kinard

CWFMNY TOUR NEWS:

Our second annual battlefield tour explores battles of 1862 in the Shenendoah Valley. It is scheduled for Thursday, May 19–Sunday, May 22. With the able guidance of Frank O'Reilly, we will be "witnessing" the battles of Winchester, Front Royal, Kernstown, McDowell, Port Republic, and Cross Keys. (There might be a few surprises, too!)

We will be residing at the Courtyard by Marriott Hotel in scenic Harrisonburg, Virginia, (540-432-3031), in the heart of the "Valley," where we'll get a real taste of the south and southern hospitality.

The 4-day, all-inclusive tour promises to be outstanding in terms both of history and amenities. The cost, which depends upon having as many Forum members and their friends as possible attending, will be in the \$700–\$750 range.

Please reserve your place on the tour as soon as possible. All you have to do is send a \$100 deposit, made out to the C.W.F.M.N.Y., to Phyllis and Howard Rosenthal, 81-15 Surrey Place, Jamaica, N.Y. 11432. Any questions, see us at the meeting or call us for additional information at 718-591-2950. Hurry, as the cut-off date for reserving to participate in this event is **March 21, 2011**.



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1861-2011 THE SESQUICENTENNIAL



I had a great Civil War Centennial. I was eight years old in 1961, and my parents took our family on trips to Gettysburg and Antietam and Manassas. I had blue and gray toy soldiers, and Civil War trading cards, and watched *Johnny Shiloh* and *Johnny Yuma*. Out of this, one man's love of history was born.

Recently I read *Troubled Commemoration*, an account of the Civil War Centennial by Robert J. Cook, and I learned that I had exactly the centennial organizers envisioned: an event to promote tourism and commercial enterprise and, oh yeah, teach a little bit of history as well.

I also learned that other people besides me also had a good centennial. Segregationists, for example, were able to turn the centennial of the war into a celebration of the Confederacy. Flying the Confederate battle flag, they used the war as an origination myth about the sacred cause of states' rights, which they used as the philosophical underpinning of the racist laws and practices they defended. Another group who had a good centennial were those in charge of developing the propaganda America used in its rivalry with Soviet communism. The America that was leading the Free World, they said, had its roots in a civil war that left us more unified, and more deeply committed to the defense of global freedom. As for which side held the moral high ground in the conflict, the cold warriors did not take sides.

Others didn't have such a good centennial. When the national Civil War Commission scheduled its first assembly in Charleston in April 1961, Madaline Williams, an African-American member of New Jersey's Civil War Centennial Commission, was told that she wouldn't be able to stay with the rest of the delegation at the segregated hotel where the events were being held. Several northern delegations said that they would stay away from the event, but the hotel management did not relent, and no state or city officials intervened. "We are surprised that a colored woman would not want to stay at a hotel for colored people," wrote one newspaper. Finally the Kennedy administration stepped in and moved the event to a naval base in Charleston, where facilities were integrated.

Neither did the Emancipation Proclamation have a particularly great centennial. Political leaders in the south made it clear that the Emancipation Proclamation had no business being mixed up with a commemoration of the Civil War. So the proclamation had its own ceremony, one that put it in a Cold War context. It was cast as pivotal moment in the cause of global freedom,

as something more meaningful in 1962 to people of the Third World still struggling against colonialism than to black Americans who were fighting for their civil rights. No African-American speakers were even part of the program until Thurgood Marshall was added at the last minute.

The only comfort that comes from reading Cook's book is the realization that thanks to the struggles of so many of our fellow citizens, we live in a much better country today.

But now, fifty years later, as we enter the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, we must realize that for those of us who care about history and about this particular event, work still remains to be done. The meaning of the Civil War is not so often being twisted in such ugly ways any longer, but there remains a basic ignorance about this event, an ignorance that lurks behind myths and fabrications and evasions.

For example, when asked about the cause of the war, far too many people—my own children for example, educated in one of the best public school districts in the country—will say that there were many reasons. Slavery was one; states rights, tariffs, and northern aggression were others. This is sad, because when you read the words spoken by the leaders of the rebellion, when you read their secession ordinances, there is only one reason: slavery—the preservation of slavery, the extension of slavery, the expansion of slavery. Six hundred thousand Americans did not die for anything as nebulous as states rights, or as ridiculous as tariffs. They died because slaveholders wanted to preserve their human property and expand their slaveholding empire, and they were willing to demolish the union and bring tragedy to nearly every family in this land in order to protect their right to own human beings.

Yet some people refuse to acknowledge the facts. Last December, 400 people attended a Secession Ball in Charleston; a spokesman said that slavery was an abomination, but that they were honoring people who stood up for their freedom. In January, Congress began its session by reading the Constitution, but omitted the part where slaves were counted as three-fifths of a person. Later, Congresswoman Michelle Bachman, said that when people came to America, "It didn't matter the color of their skin, it didn't matter their language, it didn't matter their economic status... Once you got here, we were all the same. Isn't that remarkable?"

What would be remarkable, what would make this a great sesquicentennial, would be if people no longer entertained delusions about the terrible origins of this terrible war.

—Jaime Malanowski

THE LIBRARY

by Nathan Burkan

Return to Bull Run, The Campaign and Battle of Second Manassas, by John J. Hennessy

John Hennessy's book, one of the best written by a Civil War military historian, chronicles the worst defeat in the three day Battle of Second Manassas (August 28-30, 1862) suffered by the Union Army, the only time this army faced destruction. John Pope, its commander, a politically well connected Republican, who had limited success in the West, was appointed in July of 1862 to a new command, The Army of Virginia.

The plan was to move McClellan's Army of the Potomac from its position at Harrison's Landing and link it up with Pope's army, spread out near Fredericksburg, Virginia. Time was of the essence for the joining of the two Union armies. General Robert E. Lee anticipated McClellan's delay and decided to attack Pope before he could be reinforced.

The major part of the campaign commenced on August 25th when Lee divided his army, sending



Gen. Stonewall Jackson's corps to flank Pope's rear through lightly defended Thoroughfare Gap, a narrow defile in the Bull Run Mountains. Jackson raided and destroyed Pope's supply base at Manassas Junction, and various battles ensued. Hennessy relates how Pope lacked a coherent battle plan, was obsessed in crushing Jackson without knowing the whereabouts of Lee's other corps, commanded by General James Longstreet, leaving his left flank exposed.

Thereafter Longstreet's Corps passed through Thoroughfare Gap and linked up with Jackson. On August 30th the reunited Army of Northern Virginia rolled up Pope's left flank and almost destroyed Pope's Army, but due to strong Union defensive positions on Chin Ridge and Henry Hill the way became open for the Union Army to retreat.

Pope's failures were shared in part with Generals McClellan and Halleck, but not by most of his subordinate corps, division and regimental commanders. Hennessy's concluding chapter brilliantly analyzes the campaign and dismisses Pope's attempt to blame General Fitz John Porter for the fiasco.



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