

Cape May County Civil War Round Table Newsletter = October 2018



Meeting Dates

Meetings are at 7pm at the Cape May County Museum and Historical Society, in the Military Room in the old barn.

18 October: Jake Miller, Park Historian at Fort Delaware, on the uses of the Fort during the war. **Refreshments:** Mimi Wheaton

15 November: OPEN

PLEASE, friends, send me articles, book reviews, etc to help me fill up the newsletter!

Round Table Officers

President: Andy Lolli
17 Delaware Ave, Del Haven, NJ 08251
609-889-0061

Email: andy.lolli@verizon.net

Vice President: Lou Bishop Jr.
21 Schoolhouse Ln, Cape May Court House, NJ 08210
609-463-9277 or 741-5438
southwilriseagain@aol.com

Secretary: Pat Munson-Siter
42 Franklin Ave., Villas, NJ 08251-2407
609-287-5097
patms1766@outlook.com

Treasurer: John Herr
241 80th St., Avalon, NJ 08202
609-636-2551
avalonjohn@aol.com



Minutes Sept Meeting by John Herr

The Cape May County Civil War Round Table meeting was held on Thursday, August 18. There were approximately 15 people at the meeting. 1) Donna Mattalucci opened the business portion of the meeting by reminding everybody of the upcoming “Shipwreck” lecture which will be held on Thursday, October 17 at the Cape May County Historical Museum. Donna is the general manager of the museum and a member of our CW Round Table. 2) Andy requested and it was approved by all in attendance to contribute \$30 to the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation and \$100 to the Cape May County Historical Museum. The Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation has always shown their appreciation for our support by writing formal thank you notes for all previous contributions from us. We appreciate the recognition. 3) Donna Mattalucci volunteered to provide refreshments for the November meeting. 4) Andy reminded everybody that the October 18 meeting will feature Jake Miller, Park Historian at Fort Delaware as a speaker. Should be very interesting. Please try to attend. 5) The guest speaker for the meeting was Dr. Robert Heinly from the MidAtlantic Center for the Arts and Humanities (MAC). He spoke of the life and times of Union army officer Henry Sawyer who was capture by the Confederacy in 1863 and later became very famous when he was involved in a prisoner exchange for Robert E Lee’s son. He went on to become a leading citizen and business man in Cape May during the second half of the 19th century.

Civil War Re-Enactments and More = November 2018

3 VA Tours and talks, “The Five Battles of Winchester,” at the Kernstown Battlefield, 610 Battle Park Drive, Winchester. Activities all day plus lunch. 10o am-5 pm. \$20. Registration: 202-302-9129.

3 VA “From Shrine to Museum,” special program at the White House of the Confederacy in Richmond. 2 pm. \$10. acwm.org

3 VA Walking tours, “Cockpit Point Civil War Park,” site of Confederate earthworks on the Potomac River in Woodbridge. 10 am, 1 and 3 pm. \$20. Call 703-792-4754 for more info, directions.

10 VA Bus tour, “In the Wake of Antietam, a tour of the Loudon Valley Campaign,” covers post-battle activities and small battles in Northern Virginia.

Sponsored by the Mosby Heritage Area. 9 am-3 pm.
\$60. mosbyheritagearea.org

10 VA Candlelight tour of Ben Lomond Historic Site, 1861 Confederate hospital, 10321 Sudley Manor Drive, Manassas. 8-9 pm. \$10. 703-367-7872.

16-17 PA Special program, “An Evening with the Painting,” special tour of the Gettysburg Cyclorama at the Gettysburg NMP. 6 pm. \$20/adult.
Register: gettysburgfoundation.org

17 VA Lecture, “Rear Admiral A.B. Dahlgren,” at the Mariners’ Museum in Newport News. 2:30 pm. Free with admission. marinersmuseum.org

17 PA Illumination at the Soldiers’ National Cemetery in Gettysburg. 5:30-9 pm. Free. gettysburgfoundation.org

17 PA Remembrance Day parade, ceremonies and illumination commemorating Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address at the Gettysburg NMP. Details: nps.gov/gett and gettysburgfoundation.org

18 PA Open house at the David Wills House in Gettysburg. Special programs and more commemorating Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. 6-8 pm. gettysburgfoundation.org

21 VA Lecture, “Happy Birthday, Benjamin Huger!” learn about the Confederate general at the Isle of Wight Museum in Smithfield. 12:30 pm. Free with admission. historicisleofwight.com

25 VA Living history, artillery demonstrations, at the Petersburg National Battlefield. 1-4 pm. Free with park admission. nps.gov/pete

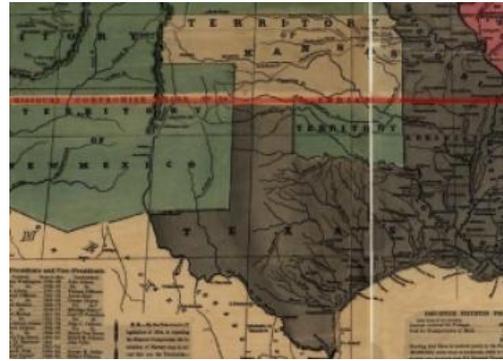
30 VA Campfire program, “Civil War Soldier’s Life,” living history at Ben Lomond Historic Site, 10321 Sudley Manor Drive, Manassas. 6-7:30 pm. \$5. 703-367-7872.

Trigger Events of the Civil War

Decades of Division

The Civil War was the culmination of a series of confrontations concerning the institution of slavery.

1820 | The Missouri Compromise



This 1856 map shows the line established by the Missouri Compromise. (Library of Congress)

In the growth years following the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, Congress was compelled to establish a policy to guide the expansion of slavery into the new western territory. Missouri’s application for statehood as a slave state sparked a bitter national debate. In addition to the deeper moral issue posed by the growth of slavery, the addition of pro-slavery Missouri legislators would give the pro-slavery faction a Congressional majority.

Ultimately, Congress reached a series of agreements that became known as the **Missouri Compromise**. Missouri was admitted as a slave state and Maine was admitted as a free state, preserving the Congressional balance. A line was also drawn through the unincorporated western territories along the 36°30’ parallel, dividing north and south as free and slave.

Thomas Jefferson, upon hearing of this deal, *“considered it at once as the knell of the Union. It is hushed indeed for the moment. But this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence. A geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated; and every new irritation will mark it deeper and deeper.”*

1831 | Nat Turner’s Rebellion



Nat Turner interpreted two solar eclipses as instructions from God to begin his rebellion. (Library of Congress)

In August of 1831, a slave named Nat Turner incited an uprising that spread through several plantations in southern Virginia. Turner and approximately seventy cohorts killed around sixty white people. The deployment of militia infantry and artillery suppressed the rebellion after two days of terror.

Fifty-five slaves, including Turner, were tried and executed for their role in the insurrection. Nearly two hundred more were lynched by frenzied mobs. Although small-scale slave uprisings were fairly common in the American South, Nat Turner's rebellion was the bloodiest.

Virginia lawmakers reacted to the crisis by rolling back what few civil rights slaves and free black people possessed at the time. Education was prohibited and the right to assemble was severely limited.

1846 - 1850 | The Wilmot Proviso

The Wilmot Proviso was a piece of legislation proposed by David Wilmot (D-FS-R PA) at the close of the Mexican-American War. If passed, the Proviso would have outlawed slavery in territory acquired by the United States as a result of the war, which included most of the Southwest and extended all the way to California.

Wilmot spent two years fighting for his plan. He offered it as a rider on existing bills, introduced it to Congress on its own, and even tried to attach it to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. All attempts failed. Nevertheless, the intensity of the debate surrounding the Proviso prompted the first serious discussions of secession.

1850 | The Compromise of 1850

With national relations soured by the debate over the Wilmot Proviso, senators Henry Clay and Stephen Douglas managed to broker a shaky accord with the **Compromise of 1850**. The compromise prevented further territorial expansion of slavery while strengthening the Fugitive Slave Act, a law which compelled Northerners to seize and return escaped slaves to the South.

While the agreement succeeded in postponing outright hostilities between the North and South, it did little to address, and in some ways even reinforced, the structural disparity that divided the United States. The new Fugitive Slave Act, by forcing non-slaveholders to participate in the institution, also led to increased polarization among centrist citizens.

1852 | *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Harriet Beecher Stowe's fictional exploration of slave life was a cultural sensation. Northerners felt as if their eyes had been opened to the horrors of slavery, while Southerners protested that Stowe's work was slanderous.

Uncle Tom's Cabin was the second-best-selling book in America in the 19th century, second only to the Bible. Its popularity brought the issue of slavery to life for those few who remained unmoved after decades of legislative conflict and widened the division between North and South.

1854 - 1861 | Bleeding Kansas

The **Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854**, narrowly passed while Congressmen brandished weapons and uttered death threats in the House chambers, overturned parts of the Missouri Compromise by allowing the settlers in the two territories to determine whether or not to permit slavery by a popular vote.

Pro- and anti-slavery agitators flocked to Kansas, hoping to shift the decision by sheer weight of numbers. The two factions struggled for five years with sporadic outbreaks of bloodshed that claimed fifty-six lives. Although both territories eventually ratified anti-slavery constitutions, the violence shocked and troubled the nation.

1857 | Dred Scott v. Sanford

Dred Scott was a Virginia slave who tried to sue for his freedom in court. The case eventually rose to the level of the Supreme Court, where the justices found that, as a slave, Dred Scott was a piece of property that had none of the legal rights or recognitions afforded to a human being.

The Dred Scott Decision threatened to entirely recast the political landscape that had thus far managed to prevent civil war. The classification of slaves as mere property made the federal government's authority to regulate the institution much more ambiguous.

Southerners renewed their challenges to the agreed-upon territorial limitations on slavery and polarization intensified.

1859 | John Brown's Raid



John Brown's stature grew in the months and years following his death. (Kansas Historical Society)

John Brown cut his teeth as a killer as an anti-slavery "Jayhawker" during Bleeding Kansas. In mid-October of 1859, the crusading abolitionist organized a small band of white allies and free blacks and **raided a government arsenal** in Harpers Ferry, Virginia. He hoped to seize weapons and distribute them to Southern slaves in order to spark a wracking series of slave uprisings.

Although Brown captured the arsenal, he was quickly surrounded and forced to surrender by soldiers under the command of Colonel **Robert E. Lee**. He was tried for treason and, upon his execution, became a martyr

for the abolitionist cause. Southerners, on the other hand, began to militarize in preparation for future raids.

1860 | Abraham Lincoln's Election

Abraham Lincoln was elected by a considerable margin in 1860 despite not being included on many Southern ballots. As a Republican, his party's anti-slavery outlook struck fear into many Southerners.

On December 20, 1860, a little over a month after the polls closed, South Carolina seceded from the Union. Six more states followed by the spring of 1861.

1861 | The Battle of Fort Sumter



Abraham Lincoln's skillful strategy forced the South to fire the first shot of the Civil War at the Battle of Fort Sumter. (Library of Congress)

With secession, several federal forts, including Fort Sumter in South Carolina, suddenly became outposts in a foreign land. Abraham Lincoln made the decision to send fresh supplies to the beleaguered garrisons.

On April 12, 1861, Confederate warships turned back the supply convoy to Fort Sumter and opened a **34-hour bombardment** on the stronghold. The garrison surrendered on April 14.

The Civil War was now underway. On April 15, Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to join the Northern army. Unwilling to contribute troops, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee dissolved their ties to the federal government.

States' Rights

The Rallying Cry of Secession

The appeal to states' rights is of the most potent symbols of the American Civil War, but confusion abounds as to the historical and present meaning of this federalist principle.

The concept of states' rights had been an old idea by 1860. The original thirteen colonies in America in the 1700s, separated from the mother country in Europe by a vast ocean, were used to making many of their own decisions and ignoring quite a few of the rules imposed on them from abroad. During the American Revolution, the founding fathers were forced to compromise with the states to ensure ratification of the Constitution and the establishment of a united country. In fact, the original Constitution banned slavery, but Virginia would not accept it; and Massachusetts would not ratify the document without a Bill of Rights.



South Carolinians crowd into the streets of Charleston in 1860 to hear speeches promoting secession.

The debate over which powers rightly belonged to the states and which to the Federal Government became heated again in the 1820s and 1830s fueled by the divisive issue of whether slavery would be allowed in the new territories forming as the nation expanded westward.

The Missouri Compromise in 1820 tried to solve the problem but succeeded only temporarily. (It established lands west of the Mississippi and below latitude 36°30' as slave and north of the line—except Missouri—as free.) Abolitionist groups sprang up in the North, making Southerners feel that their way of life was under attack. A violent slave revolt in 1831 in Virginia, Nat Turner's Rebellion, forced the South to close ranks against criticism out of fear for their lives. They began to argue that slavery was not only necessary, but in fact, it was a positive good.

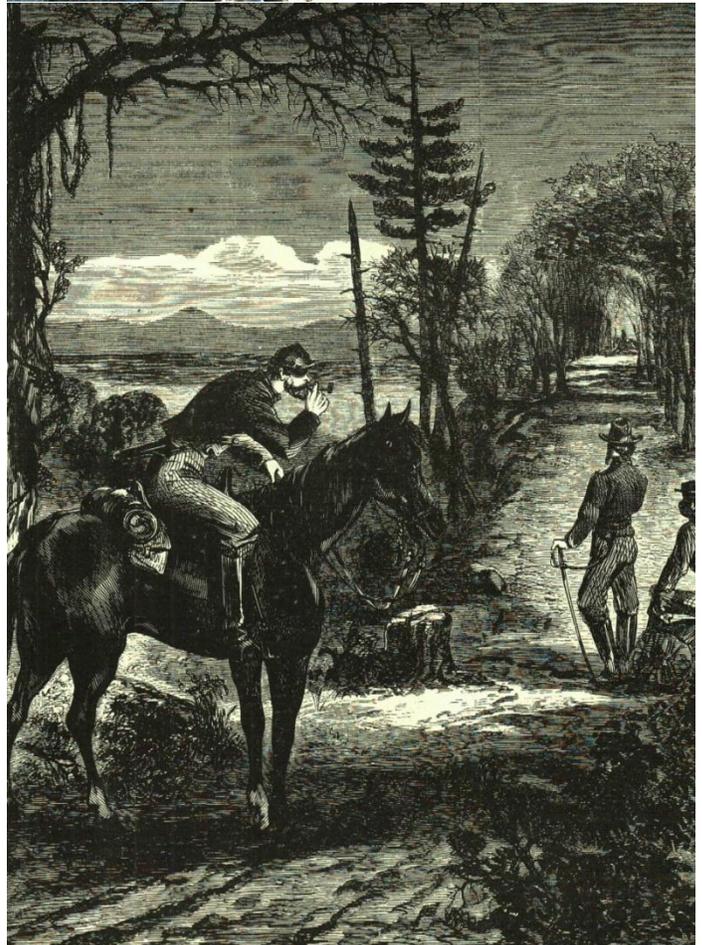
As the North and the South became more and more different, their goals and desires also separated. Arguments over national policy grew even fiercer. The North's economic progress as the Southern economy began to stall fueled the fires of resentment. By the 1840s and 1850s, North and South had each evolved extreme positions that had as much to do with serving their own political interests as with the morality of slavery.

As long as there were an equal number of slave-holding states in the South as non-slave-holding states in the North, the two regions had even representation in the Senate and neither could dictate to the other. However, each new territory that applied for statehood threatened to upset this balance of power. Southerners consistently argued for states rights and a weak federal government but it was not until the 1850s that they raised the issue of secession. Southerners argued that, having ratified the Constitution and having agreed to join the new nation in the late 1780s, they retained the power to cancel the agreement and they threatened to do just that unless, as South Carolinian John C. Calhoun put it, the Senate passed a constitutional amendment to give back to the South "the power she possessed of protecting herself before the equilibrium of the two sections was destroyed."

Controversial—but peaceful—attempts at a solution included legal compromises, arguments, and debates such as the Wilmot Proviso in 1846, Senator Lewis Cass' idea of popular sovereignty in the late 1840s, **the Compromise of 1850**, the **Kansas-Nebraska Act** in 1854, and the Lincoln-Douglas Debates in 1858. However well-meaning, Southerners felt that the laws favored the Northern economy and were designed to slowly stifle the South out of existence. **The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850** was one of the only pieces of legislation clearly in favor of the South. It meant that Northerners in free states were obligated, regardless of their feelings towards slavery, to turn escaped slaves who had made it North back over to their Southern masters. Northerners strongly resented the law and it was one of the inspirations for the publishing of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852.

Non-violent attempts at resolution culminated in violence in 1859 when Northern abolitionist John

Brown abandoned discussion and took direct action in a raid on the arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Though unsuccessful, the raid confirmed Southern fears of a Northern conspiracy to end slavery. When anti-slavery Republican **Abraham Lincoln** won the presidential election in 1860, Southerners were sure that the North meant to take away their right to govern themselves, abolish slavery, and destroy the Southern economy. Having exhausted their legal and political options, they felt that the only way to protect themselves from this Northern assault was to no longer be a part of the United States of America. Although the Southern states seceded separately, without intending to form a new nation, they soon banded together in a loose coalition. Northerners, however, led by Abraham Lincoln, viewed secession as an illegal act. The Confederate States of America was not a new country, they felt, but a group of treasonous rebels.



Cape May Civil War Round Table

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