



# THE drum roll

380th Regular Meeting Volume 39 Number 9 May 6, 2022

## Turning Points at Gettysburg

Meeting starts at 7:00 pm

Friday, May 6, 2022, 7:00 p.m.  
Arlington Heights Public Library  
Hendrickson Room - 2nd Floor



Coming to the third summer of the Civil War, the Battle of Gettysburg would prove pivotal. The magnitude of the war had become a reality in 1862 in addition to internal conflicts on both sides that had come to the surface.

Union armies needed a victory to enforce the validity of the actions taken by the Lincoln administration and initiate a new era for the United States. The Confederacy needed a truly decisive victory to hasten the end of the war. Much of it hung in balance.

Arguably, Gettysburg has become the single most written about battle of the war. But, perhaps some of the key moments have escaped attention in the vast amount of material that has been produced. Incidents, that seemed of little or even no importance in the moment, would significantly contribute to the outcome of this battle.

Jonathan Sebastian earned his B.A. in history from Judson College (now University) and his M.A. in Public History from Loyola University in Chicago. He

has been an adjunct professor of history at Judson University teaching World History 1500 to the present and U.S. History. He was a tour guide at Jubilee College State Historic site outside of Peoria, Illinois, a project-based researcher at the Pritzker Military Library, and was the curator of the Fisher Farm historic site in Bensenville, Illinois. Currently, he is an experience facilitator at the Arlington Heights Historical Museum.

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Photo courtesy of Ken Tokarz

On April 1, the Round Table met in person for the first time in two years. Our guest speaker for this return to three dimensions was none other than Robert E. Lee, as portrayed by Paul Wolf.

The general began by stressing that God does not interfere in man's matters; rather, God makes men come to their own decisions. And Lee had a major one to make at the war's outset. After the first wave of secession, Lee was called to Washington for consultation. (Being in Texas, one of the Rebel states, he departed in civilian clothing, lest he be detained as a Federal officer.) After the attack on Fort Sumter, he met with U.S. general Winfield Scott, then politician Francis Blair, then Scott again – being offered command of the entire United States Army. Lee at first attempted to stay neutral, but after meeting with the Richmond government of newly seceded Virginia, he accepted a position as a Major General of all Virginia Militia. The general explained that the oath he had taken in the military was, first and foremost, to his state; his strong sense of duty and honor required that he resign from the U.S. Army and join Virginia.

Hoping for a field command, Lee instead functioned initially as a consultant. Finally sent to the field, his first campaign (in western Virginia) did not go smoothly. Lee related that a combination of a generally hostile population, lack of support from Richmond, and the shortcomings of his principal subordinates (Henry Wise, John Floyd and William Loring) proved too much to overcome. His next

assignment was to oversee coastal defenses in Florida, South Carolina and Georgia. Here, the press coverage Lee received was generally negative; he was tagged with the sobriquet "King of Spades" for his extensive entrenching. Eventually, he returned to Richmond as a military advisor.

By late May, 1862, George McClellan's Union army was but five miles from Richmond; General Lee described going up into a church steeple and being able to see the blue hordes. He related a horseback meeting with President Davis and General Joseph Johnston on the battlefield on May 31, as fighting raged. Shortly thereafter, Johnston was badly wounded, and the next day (June 1) Lee was placed in command of Johnston's army, which he immediately re-named the Army of Northern Virginia. He commented that Johnston had been uncommunicative with Davis; Lee was determined to learn from that mistake and keep Davis informed. Lee also reorganized the army, called in Stonewall Jackson from the Shenandoah Valley, and in late June launched the Seven Days battles that, despite heavier casualties than the shocking bloodbath a couple of months earlier at Shiloh, succeeded in beating McClellan away from the gates of Richmond and to refuge down the James River.

The general then led us through a litany of opposing commanders. First was John Pope, whom Lee thrashed at Second Manassas. This led to the invasion of Maryland, and a re-match with McClellan. Lee expressed the opinion that his invasion traversed the wrong part of Maryland – the western part, which was mainly pro-union (as opposed to the more heavily slaveholding eastern section.) He related the story of the Lost Order, the battle of Antietam, and his thorough understanding of Little Mac (which led Lee to stay on the field the entire day after the battle, despite the seeming risk.) He characterized Burnside's plan at the start of the Fredericksburg campaign as a good one, ruined by Northern delays (the pontoons in particular.) Joe Hooker's plan for the spring 1863 campaign was also a good one, according to Lee. But after Jeb Stuart's recon revealed the vulnerable Union flank, Lee recalled asking Stonewall Jackson how many men he needed for his flank march. Jackson smiled as he replied, "The whole corps." Of course, this story ended with the wounding and subsequent death of Stonewall, and Lee's famed statement that Jackson had lost his left arm, but Lee had lost his right.

This naturally led to the Gettysburg campaign. The general detailed the reorganization of his army into three corps, with the experienced division commanders Richard Ewell and A.P. Hill promoted to command two of them. He did lament the failure of Ewell to seize Culp's Hill on July 1, citing Ewell's unfamiliarity with Lee's command style, and noted that Hill became sick early on, leaving him unable to properly administer his corps. But Lee had the most to say about the usually reliable James Longstreet, whom Lee saw as essentially foot-dragging. He said that his biggest mistake of the campaign was probably not realizing just how set against the move Longstreet was. Lee noted the approximately 33% Confederate casualties as well as his post-battle offer to resign, which of course was refused.

Picking up with the 1864 Overland campaign, the general recalled how his initial move into the Wilderness worked, with his army prevailing – only to see U.S. Grant press on through the bloodbaths of Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor (Lee mentioned Grant's "butcher" nickname from the latter contest.) When Grant moved on again, this time to Petersburg, Lee praised the stubborn defense led by P.G.T. Beauregard that bought time for Lee to arrive on the scene, resulting in a 9-month siege.

As the spring of 1865 approached, Lee tried to break the Union stranglehold at Fort Stedman on March 25. That failure led to the inevitable Union breakthrough at the start of April, the abandonment of Petersburg and Richmond, and the short campaign to Appomattox. Lee presented three possible options: Turn and face his pursuers, try to reach Joe Johnston in North Carolina, or disband the army and take to guerilla warfare. But at Appomattox he realized the jig was up, and the famous surrender took place. Lee credited Grant with generosity in his surrender terms, and recalled that, when asked if he had the authority to surrender other armies, Lee could only offer his own army.

Following the surrender, Lee went back to Richmond, feeling angry at his ultimate failure and thinking about his now-deceased subordinates such as Jackson, Stuart and A.P. Hill. He recalled being concerned about the fate of the Southern people and wondering what would become of the newly-freed former slaves. Lee also expressed puzzlement at being cheered when he returned to the Confederate capital – it made no sense to him. A summation of his

brief post-war life, primarily his presidency of Washington (now Washington and Lee) college, ended with his death in 1870. The general also revealed an unexpected insight: His single greatest regret was the choice of a military education, due to the bloodshed and suffering that came with it.

On behalf of the Round Table, I would like to thank Robert E. Lee /Paul Wolf for a fascinating evening.

## May Saturday Discussion

Saturday May 21, all members and guests are invited to participate in the session via zoom. Pat McCormick will lead the discussion on the Battle of Chancellorsville. It will start at 10:00 AM.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82919662295?pwd=YmVXMIQwNW9pUk8yNndXWFFPK3ZDUT09>

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## Book Raffle

There will be a book raffle as per our usual raffle tickets. Also the roundtable is looking for someone to take over the book raffle -

**PLEASE HELP!**

In accordance Jerry Rodosky will bring a couple of boxes of books to sell for a price to help with our preservation fund.

### April Book Raffle Winners

The Battle of Wilson's Creek by Edwin C. Bearss was Wayne Rhine, Soldier Boy edited by Barry Popchock was Charlie Banks and The History of the Irish Brigade by Sgt. Kirkland was Pat McCormick. Also thanks to the members who purchase books off on the side.



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#### Appointed Positions

Book Raffle	<b>Vacant</b>
Newsletter Editor	Charlie Banks - Temp.

**Note The Time Change for Start of Meeting due to the Library Closing at 9:00 PM.**

## Upcoming Events

Tuesday May 10, McHenry County CWRT, Fred Reczkowicz on The Battle of Ball's Bluff at 7:00 pm at the Woodstock Public Library in the basement.

Friday May 13, The Chicago CWRT will present Dr. Thomas Carson on Lincoln as Moral Exemplar at 7:30 pm

### Proposed Officers Slate for 22-23

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**Elections will be held at the June Meeting. Anyone who wants to help the roundtable and run for an office position please contact Wayne Rhine.**

**Also June's meeting will be held at the library at 7:00 pm. There will be no banquet this year.**