

Tennessee Valley Civil War Round Table January 2019 Newsletter



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The 2019 Schedule of Speakers

This year the speakers include activity and leadership in the Western Theater, action and the aftermath of war in both North and South Alabama. Special presentation by members of the Round Table Ed Kennedy, John Scales, and Peggy Towns add to the character of the year.

14-Feb, Ed Kennedy, Ft. Pillow: Massacre or Myth,

14-Mar, Claire Woerner, Cemetery, Markers and Meanings

11-Apr, TBD

9-May, Curt Fields, Author, Grant's Relief of Chattanooga

14-Jun, John Carter, 9th Alabama Infantry

11-Jul, Spruill, Decisions at Stone's River,

8-Aug, Paul Brueske, Battle of Mobile

12-Sep, Rebecca Davis/Dakota Cotton, (April), Civil War Athens,

10-Oct, John Scales Annual Tour location TBD

14-Nov, Peggy Towns, United States Colored Troops (USCT)



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ANNOUNCEMENTS;



Author, Speaker,
Attorney Chris McIlwain

He's back! In January 2017 we began the New Year with a presentation on the Civil War in Alabama and this, Alabama's Bicentennial year, on Thursday, January 10, our first presentation, once again, is Chris McIlwain addressing his new book "*Who Helped Kill a President*" the killing of Abraham Lincoln. See book review page 5.

Chris McIlwain is an attorney in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He is an avid scholar of Alabama history, including its role in the Civil War. He has spent the last 27 years researching nineteenth-century Alabama, focusing particularly on law, politics, and the Civil War. His article "United States District Judge Richard Busted and the Alabama Klan Trials of 1872" appeared in the Alabama Review. His previous book celebrated by the Round Table addressed the Civil War in Alabama.

LET'S VISIT NICK'S RISTORANTE



Our friend Nick of Nick's Restaurante
Street SW Huntsville)

Nick's Ristorante remains the #1 steakhouse in North East Alabama and now has the Best Chef in the Valley as voted in The Planet.



Tim Davis takes home the Nick's certificate.

We Thank, Homewood Suites by Hilton, (714 Gallatin Street SW Huntsville) for their support for the Round Table.



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In the event a scheduled meeting must be canceled, visit the website www.tvcwrt.org for a detailed update no later than 3:00 P.M. on the day of the meeting. A cancelation will only be for weather or if the Elks Lodge has an unexpected facility issue that requires closure. The board will not attempt to contact members.

If you shop on the web and particularly from Amazon please order thru Amazon Smile and choose TVCWRT (Spell out Tennessee Valley Civil War Round Table) as your charity choice and help fund the Round Table 24/7/365 days of the year.

Athens Spirited Cemetery Stroll Last Fall; by Carol Codori



Photo courtesy of Patricia White Nation, who portrayed a favorite aunt at the Stroll.

The weather was cold and wet, but the “spirits” were warm and happy to share their stories. The history buried in Athens City Cemetery is the history of the Southeast during America’s Western expansion. Many Civil War ancestors rest there as well.

On November 4, several members enjoyed the annual stroll in period dress, to help honor those who came before. This was a Bicentennial event, ably hosted by Teresa Todd, Athens-Limestone County tourism director, and Lee Hattabaugh with Sons of Confederate Veterans, Hobbs Camp.

See photo: Left to right, J.R. White played the role of James Bradley White; Diane Hayes played the role of Eliza White; Gilbert White played the role of James White (the Salt King of Abingdon, Virginia.) James Bradley White was James's and Eliza's grandson. Gilbert White is the author of an article featured in the Huntsville Historical Review focused on the Salt King.



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The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at UAH's Winter term begins Monday 28 January 2019. Submitted by John Mason, former President of the TVCWRT.

The TVCWRT's own John Mason will be teaching *Decisive Battles: The Western Theater of the American Civil War* on Tuesdays, beginning on the 29th from 0845 - 1015. In the American Civil War, Virginia and the East get all the press, but the decisive battles of that war were actually fought in the Western Theater, an area defined as running from the Mississippi River to Atlanta and from Kentucky to the Gulf of Mexico. Come examine this theater in terms of geography, key battles and campaigns, and a discussion of the various generals, strategy, and political infighting that affected their outcomes and ultimately led to a Union victory. Visit Osher,uah.edu/OLLIRegistration or phone 256-824-6010 for more information."

Board Report

The Membership; submitted by Membership Chair, Kevin Rodriguez; our membership stands at 142, including families and students. **Renew your membership and recruit new members now.**

TVCWRT Features

Book Reviews

The Million-Dollar Man
Who Helped Kill a
President
George Washington Gayle and the
Assassination of Abraham Lincoln



The untold story of the arrest, guilty plea, and
presidential pardon of the man who bankrolled one of
the world's most famous assassinations

Christopher Lyle McIlwain, Sr.

The Million-Dollar Man Who Helped Kill a President, George Washington Gayle and the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, by Christopher Lyle McIlwain, Sr. El Dorado Hills: Savas Beatie LLC, 2018, Tennessee Valley Civil War Round Table Book review by Emil L. Posey

President Lincoln was reviled by many in the Confederacy, being considered the cause of the Civil War and the personification of all the wrongs the North had perpetrated on the South. As the war ran on, and particularly in its waning days, many concluded that his assassination was warranted. These feelings came together on the evening of April 14, 1865, when John Wilkes Booth shot the president at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C. Vice President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of State William H. Seward had also been targeted that fateful night. President Lincoln died the next morning. The would-be assassin targeting VP Johnson lost his nerve and Seward was only wounded.



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Anger and hatred flared in the North, and federal efforts to find and bring the conspirators to justice were intense. Booth was shot resisting arrest in a barn on Garnett's Farm in King George County, VA on the morning of April 26, 1865. In the ensuing days and weeks scores of others were arrested (including co-conspirator David Herold who was with Booth when he was killed.) Having had the slightest contact with the conspiracy was grounds. In the end, all were released except for eight. Of these, each was found guilty of participating in the conspiracy. Four were executed by hanging, three were given life prison sentences, and one sentenced to six years.

One of those caught up in the sweep was an Alabama firebrand lawyer, George Washington Gayle, former Democratic state legislator and US attorney for the Southern District of Alabama – the “Million-Dollar Man” whose involvement in the assassination Christopher Lyle McIlwain, Sr. studies in this book. Conventional histories portray Gayle as a tangential figure, certainly sympathetic to efforts to bring President Lincoln down, but not a direct player. Mr. McIlwain sees Gayle's role differently – less tangential and more direct. What was Gayle's contribution to the assassination of President Lincoln? It revolved around his publication in a local newspaper, the Selma Dispatch, in December 1864 a call – an advertisement – for contributions towards raising \$1 million (and towards which he contributed the first \$1,000) for the express purpose of paying for the assassination of President Lincoln, Vice President Johnson, and Mr. Seward by the following March 1, 1865. Serious intent? Did it substantively contribute towards the actual assassination? You must read the book to find that out, but I will say that Mr. McIlwain provides substantive argument and well-reasoned conclusions.

This is a substantive yet concise read. It provides history at the personal level of the growth and development of the Secessionist movement and, ultimately, the assassination plot, principally as that history developed in South Carolina and Alabama, with the focus on Gayle within the pantheon of local politicians and activists all along the way. Mr. McIlwain's lawyerly experience and training shines through with his meticulous attention to detail and masterful reliance on period newspaper reporting and commentary for flavor and contemporary context.

It eventuated that Gayle was apprehended by federal authorities and held in prison pending trial by military tribunal – a trial that never came. For various reasons analyzed by Mr. McIlwain, the trial was delayed. Then, in an interesting turn, President Andrew Johnson authorized his parole from the prison at Fort Pulaski near Savannah, Georgia. The terms of his parole required him to return to Alabama for trial by a civil court rather than a military court (which was falling out of favor as the venue of choice). President Johnson finally pardoned him in full on April 27, 1867, before the civil trial could be arranged. It turned out to be quite a ride for Mr. Gayle, and quite a tale described by Mr. McIlwain. Enjoy!



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Christopher Lyle McIlwain, Sr., has been practicing law for more than three decades in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. This is the third book Mr. McIlwain has written. The other two were Civil War Alabama (co-authored with G. Ward Hubbs; Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016) and 1865 Alabama: From Civil to Uncivil Peace (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017). He has also published several articles in a variety of history journals.

Tennessee's Civil War Battlefields: A Guide to Their History and Preservation, By Randy Bishop. Photos, maps, notes, bibliography, index, 456 pages, 2010, Pelican Publishing. Review by Lee Hattabaugh TVCWRT

Mississippi's Civil War Battlefields: A Guide to Their History and Preservation, By Randy Bishop. Photos, maps, notes, bibliography, index, 432 pages, 2010, Pelican Publishing.

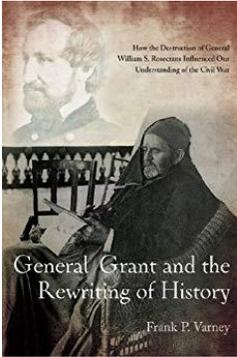
Although I was, unfortunately, unable to finish reading both of these books, I heartily recommend both of them (as well as Mr. Bishop's similar study of Kentucky's battlefields) to members of the TVCWRT. Mr. Bishop has created books which are suitable for either bed-side reading or as a field guide. Using maps of each battle area, first-hand accounts, and a plethora of other sources (footnoted and indexed), both of these publications provide a brief history of the area, a narrative of the battle(s) as well as the area's current state of preservation (i.e. what you'll see if you visit).

Regarding the book's use as a field guide, I must confess that they are a bit bulky, at over 400 pages each, for carrying in the field. I was happy to find that the Mississippi and Kentucky books are available in e-reader versions, and I hope that an electronic version of the Tennessee book will be made available soon.

Randy Bishop is also the author of Pelican's ***The Tennessee Brigade***. In addition to teaching history at Middleton High School, he is an adjunct for Jackson State Community College. Bishop received the Teacher of the Year Award six times and was recognized in *Who's Who Among America's Teachers*. He resides in Middleton, Tennessee.



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General Grant and the Rewriting of History, Frank P. Varney, Savas Beatie, El Dorado Hills, California, 2018, \$19.95.

While revisionist history generally has pejorative connotations, *General Grant and the Rewriting of History* by Dr. Varney is an excellent case for “revisionism”. Varney does an excellent job of re-assessing what has been written by over a century’s worth of historians and analyzing the subject matter using common sense and most importantly, critical thinking.

His work has produced a very detailed and analytical assessment of General U.S. Grant using primary source documents. What Varney shows is that what we know of Grant’s wartime performance is biased and, in many cases, traced back to what Grant says it should be, not what it actually was in a number of cases. This is a problem as errors in fact have been propagated, many times by very reputable historians as is proven by the author.

I believe, based on years of study and reading as well as personal experience as a professional infantry officer, that Grant was a good soldier prone to human emotions like any other. Although Grant has many fine attributes to commend him as a leader, he also is shown by Varney to have a darker side, especially with those he took a disliking to. Generals Rosecrans and Gouverneur K. Warren were but two of whom unfairly suffered from Grant’s displeasure.

The old adage that the “victors write the history” is certainly applicable to Grant’s memoirs. Published twenty years after the war and based on Grant’s personal memories and subject to his prejudices and biases, *The Memoirs of Ulysses Simpson Grant* has been used for decades as a primary source without serious critical assessment. There is good reason for this. Grant won. No one can deny that his accomplishments were substantial. This lends credence to what Grant writes as “the” official records. However, Varney finds well-founded faults with not only the memoirs, but with those who used them as the definitive source for their interpretations. Many substantive and highly-placed historians have fallen victim to taking Grant’s word unquestioningly. It is a human failing to not seriously question the word of leaders of Grant’s stature but it should be done. This is accomplished through extensive cross-referencing with primary sources and good detective work by Varney who, combining logic and common sense, discovers a number of problems with Grant’s version of history. I believe that Varney actually approached this topic with an open mind giving Grant the benefit of the doubt but the facts enumerated by Varney are convincingly undeniable in most cases.

General Grant and the Rewriting of History focuses on Generals Grant’s and Rosecrans’s wartime experiences and relationship. How Grant came to be at such variance with Rosecrans is puzzling. Rosecrans was a year ahead of Grant at



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West Point and both left the Army after stints on active service. There is no indication that they were at odds prior to 1862, and, in fact, might have been friends due to their common and somewhat similar military backgrounds.

Rosecrans was a capable and talented officer and leader. He had his faults -- including pride and perhaps excessive ambition. However, he was roundly admired by many of his subordinate leaders and soldiers. Grant's treatment of Rosecrans appears solely to have been based on a personal vendetta sparked by an unsubstantiated letter from another Union officer to Grant alleging Rosecrans' disloyalty. Grant seems to have placed much credence in this correspondence, affecting his relationship with Rosecrans.

Varney skillfully weaves a "pattern of deceit" by Grant beginning with Shiloh and how his performance is recorded for posterity. Grant definitively shows a pattern of mis-remembered events and outright misrepresentations in his memoir of these events. Memories tend to fade but the recorded official records, written contemporaneously or shortly after the events in question, are at odds with Grant's memoir's accounts. Varney demonstrates the substantive "disconnects" in a number of cases using not just the Official Records, but the recollections of a number of other participants.

As the war progressed, Grant appears to not only have mis-remembered events, he actively sought to change their official recording for reasons we can only now speculate. The re-writing of battle reports by Grant's staff and changing of initial assessments of subordinates like Rosecrans demonstrate Grant was subject to unseemly emotions that average people experience. Revenge, jealousy, and pettiness are not characteristics we normally attribute to senior military leaders. They are humans however and subject to the same failings. It is not unreasonable to understand that Grant suffers from these shortcomings in human nature.

The root of the Grant-Rosecrans divide is traced to Iuka in 1862 where, after a reasonably generous post-battle report, Grant turns on Rosecrans to blame him for the Confederate's escape. The battle at Corinth and the Tullahoma campaign lay the foundation for Rosecrans' denouement at Chickamauga. Grant became even more critical ---- mostly without serious cause. At this point however, I part ways with Varney's analyses.

Having led both staff rides and tours of military leaders and US Army Command and General Staff College students to Chickamauga for almost twenty-five years, I cannot countenance Varney's explanation of the battle failure being pinned on BG Thomas J. Wood. Varney, I believe falls into the same trap he exposes in other historians by stating the Wood's performance was intentionally based on a personal grudge. The substantiation is conjecture and opinion, not fact. This is the only place I find Varney to show a bias in an otherwise very balanced study. The fact is that a number of circumstances, including Rosecrans' bad decision-making and unclear orders due to physical



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and mental exhaustion combined to cause the Union battle disaster. Despite rumor and conjecture, a general officer (Wood) intending to punish his commander in the heat of battle goes against logic when the consequences for Wood's own command could have been catastrophic.

That Rosecrans and others like G.K. Warren suffered unfairly is a fact. Leadership is a human endeavor and leaders and subordinates are both subject to human emotions. They are not perfect. However, Varney shows convincingly that Grant went beyond the bounds of professionalism to punish Rosecrans for imagined offenses. It even extended to the post-war period when both had left the Army which smacks of personal revenge. He backed his decisions by changing the official records and then insuring they survived in perpetuity by recording his feelings in memoirs. Both Rosecrans and Warren are better than to be remembered for their reliefs by Grant.

Dr. Varney has done a tremendous service for the historical record by critically analyzing Grant's memoirs. His book is logical and clearly written with an excellent bibliography which demonstrates academic rigor on this topic. *General Grant and the Rewriting of History* adds much to our knowledge of the war. I highly recommend it to those with an interest in setting the records straight.

Nooks and Crannies; American Military Thought in 1860;

American generals of 1861, facing a military problem as vast as Napoleon's invasion of Russia, studied Jomini in the misguided faith that they were studying Napoleon. They marched against strategic points – Corinth, Richmond, Atlanta – content to let Confederate armies escape to fight again, so long as they could occupy this real estate. And so the war worried on, until other commanders emerged, possessing the true, brutally clear Napoleonic appreciation.

John R. Elting, "Jomini, Disciple of Napoleon?", Military Affairs 23 (Spring 1964), 17-26.

This past October, in Part 1, we looked at how French doctrine, derived from Napoleonic warfare, as interpreted and codified by Baron Antoine-Henri de Jomini, mixed with the Army's own challenges and experience after the War of 1812 formed the foundation of the nation's military thought as we entered the Civil War. In Part 2 in the November issue of our newsletter we addressed the evolution of that doctrine (particularly the Union's approach) as the Civil War progressed, moving along a learning curve from Jominian theory to a strategy and operations based more on what would come to be known as Clausewitzian theory. Nooks and Crannies will pick this up next month with an overview of opening moves as the Civil War got underway in earnest.



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Little Round Table Report; January 24, 2019:

Join the fearless:

"I don't care for John Pope one pinch of owl dung." – Sam Sturgis. How did a Union junior officer whose contemporaries felt this way about him become a major general? Learn about Pope's early career at the Little Round Table on January 24th.

TVCWRT Little Round Table Discussion Schedule, 2019 **The Civil War west of the Mississippi river, 1861-62, a seven-part series**

Take a glance at the schedule for 2019. There is time to jump in and learn a lot.

February 28, 2019 - John Pope, part 2, goes east and meets R. E. Lee

Led by Jeff Ewing

March 28, 2019 – John Pope, part 3, meets R. E. Lee

Led by Jeff Ewing

April 25, 2019 - Aug. 1862 to June 1863 – A dizzying 10-month transformation of the corps commands

Led by Jeff Ewing

23 May, 2019 - Two did not climb Culps Hill on 1 Jul, 1863: Generals Ewell and Slocum...why not?

Led by Jeff Ewing

27 June, 2019 - Peninsula Campaign 1- The decision to move the Army of the Potomac to the York Peninsula; the Siege of Yorktown

Led by Emil Posey

25 July, 2019 - Peninsula Campaign 2- Battles of Williamsburg, Fair Oaks

Lead **Needed**

22 August, 2019 - Peninsula Campaign 3- Jackson in the Valley, how he influenced the Peninsula Campaign

Lead **Needed**

26 September, 2019 - Peninsula Campaign 4- Federal response to Jackson's success, The Army of Virginia

Lead **Needed**

24 October 2019 - Peninsula Campaign 5- Lee takes charge; both sides fortify and Feds emplace the siege guns; Stuart's Ride

Lead **Needed**

12 December 2019 - The Most Important New Weapon of the American Civil War

Led by Mark Hubb



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Many Thanks!



Janet E. Croon and John Scales, former President of the TVCWRT.

The end of 2019 wrapped up with a couple of great presentations, one based upon the life of a young man dying of tuberculosis during the civil war. Janet E. Croon, the editor of “The War Outside My Window”, the diary of Leroy Wiley Gresham, provided a stimulating presentation.

In December, approximately 45 brave members and guests ventured out to hear Allen Schmitt detail the history of the Dunker Church featured in the celebrated Confederate dead photograph taken during the aftermath of the Antietam battle. The church, often seen by civil war enthusiasts but seldom noticed, is finally illustrated and examined in Barkley’s book, “September Mourn”. You can find a review of the book provided by Emil Posey on www.TVCWRT.org



Co-Author Allen Schmitt, former resident of Huntsville, presenting his perspective on Dunker Church.

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