

Sumter to Appomattox

The Official Newsletter of the New South Wales Chapter of
The American Civil War Round Table of Australia

No. 27, April 2006

Special Conference Edition

Please note, our new website www.americancivilwar.asn.au is now up and running

A Message from the Chairman –

May I take this opportunity to welcome you to this 2006 Conference of the NSW Chapter of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia. A special welcome goes to our interstate participants and, in particular, our visiting speakers Paul Spencer from South Australia and Dr Angus Curry from Victoria.

Although we were unsuccessful in getting two high profile former politicians and eminent Civil War scholars to present a paper at our conference, we are most fortunate to have Dr Frances Clarke, Lecturer in American History at the University of Sydney to deliver the keynote address for the conference –

“Wounded Veterans and the Shifting Meanings of the Civil War”

Added to this will be La Trobe University’s Angus Curry’s examination of Lincoln’s assassination and its aftermath providing what I believe will be a fascinating set of presentations around our conference theme of:

Appomattox and Beyond

The “dark horse” in our line-up of speakers is Bruce Dennett, a secondary school History teacher and a former recipient of the Premier’s American Travelling Scholarship. Bruce, who is known to some of us from his presentation at our last conference, is addressing the “Politics and Practice of Reconstruction” and is guaranteed to provide us all with some most useful insights to the turbulent period following the War.

The United States Consul General, Mr Stephen T Smith, has agreed to open the conference and it will be interesting to hear how a contemporary American citizen perceives their seminal conflict of the 19th Century and what he thinks of our present interest in their War nearly 150 years ago.

The various papers presented at this conference are to be collected in bound copy form and circulated to all conference participants as soon as possible after the conference, thus providing a permanent record of what we envisage as being a most memorable day.

It is worth noting, also, that the additional \$10 paid for the Conference Registration by non-ACWRTA members who might wish to join our Chapter of the Round Table, will entitle them to membership to the Chapter until June 2007 at no extra cost.

It is not possible to hold a conference such as this without the strong support and assistance of a lot of people. To our Committee who laboured long and hard to ensure everything was as we intended it to be, a big thank you! In particular, I would want to thank Bruce McLennan for his sterling work in publicising the conference over many months. Each person presenting a paper at today’s conference has spent many hours researching their topic and this will show in the quality of their presentations. Thank you for the trouble you have gone to so that today can be interesting informative and provide something new for all of us.

To the kind and regular donors of the various prizes we are extremely grateful, as their kind donations keeps our “bottom line looking healthy” (and our Treasurer happy). To all participants, without whom all our planning would have been for nought, thank you for your interest and participation in the day and I hope the conference meets your expectations.

Paul Kensey

Stop Press – Paul Wins an Award!

It’s now official that our Chairman Paul Kensey has won the 2005 Reg Penrose award for his presentation, *American Hero or Just Plain Stupid? The Life and Death of George Armstrong Custer*. This award is determined by the votes of members of ACWRTA who were present at the various meetings in Melbourne during the year. There is no doubting our Melbourne cousins’ judgments of quality. Congratulations Paul but none of us was surprised at the result!

It Happened in April

HATCHES AND DESPATCHES

April 2, 1865 – Confederate General A P Hill is killed outside Petersburg, Virginia;

April 5, 1839 – Robert Smalls (USN), the only African American naval captain during the Civil War, is born in Beaufort, S.C.;

April 15, 1865 – President Lincoln dies at 7:22 am after being shot the previous night at Ford's Theatre by John Wilkes Booth;

April 26, 1865 – John Wilkes Booth is shot and killed;

April 27, 1822 – Ulysses S Grant is born at Point Pleasant, Ohio.

COMMAND AND POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS

April 15, 1865 – Andrew Johnson sworn in as President after Lincoln's death;

April 22, 1861 – Robert E Lee is named commander of the forces of Virginia;

BATTLES / MILITARY ACTIONS

April 1, 1865 – At the Battle of Five Forks Lee's forces are defeated by the Union army, which now threatens his route of retreat;

April 3, 1865 – Federal troops occupy Richmond and Petersburg;

April 6, 1865 – The last major engagement between the Army of Northern Virginia (Lee) and Army of the Potomac (Grant) occurs at Saylor's Creek, Virginia;

April 8, 1864 – Nathaniel Banks' Federals "skedaddle" from Richard Taylor's Confederates at the Battle of Sabine Crossroads, La;

April 11, 1861 – Confederate representatives visit Fort Sumter and demand its surrender;

April 12, 1861 – Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor is fired on thus beginning the War;

April 12, 1865 – The formal surrender ceremony of what remained of the Army of Northern Virginia to the Federal Army of the Potomac at Appomattox;

April 13, 1861 – After 24 hours of bombardment, the Union Force within Fort Sumter is forced to surrender.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

April 2, 1865 – The Confederate government evacuates Richmond;

April 9, 1865 – Confederate General Robert E Lee surrenders to Union General Ulysses S Grant at Appomattox Court House;

April 17, 1861 – Virginia adopts an ordinance of secession;

April 17, 1865 - Joseph E Johnston surrenders to Sherman near Durham Station N.C.;

April 18, 1865 – Johnston and Sherman sign "a memorandum or basis of agreement" calling for an armistice by all armies in the field;

April 19, 1865 – Funeral services held for Lincoln;

April 21, 1865 – The train bearing Lincoln's body leaves Washington for Springfield, Illinois;

April 24, 1865 – President Johnson and his Cabinet reject the terms of agreement of Sherman and Johnston and directs that hostilities must resume if there is no surrender;

April 26, 1865 – General Johnston formally surrenders troops under his command to General Sherman after intervention by Grant.

Did You Catch the Program on Grant?

Did anybody catch the TV program screened on ABC Channel 2 over a number of Sundays in February? This series was an *'American Experience'* program, originally screened in 2002 on PBS in the United States.

The series surveys Grant's early life, his rise to prominence during the Civil War, the outcomes of his Presidency in terms of his successes and the failures, the final years of his life when his financial dealings left him and his family almost penniless and the completion of his memoirs in the days before his death that provided financial security for his family.

If you missed this excellent series, it is currently available as a DVD from Amazon.com for the very reasonable price of US\$17:99 with an additional US\$4:35 for shipping and handling. This DVD is highly recommended for Civil War scholars and enthusiasts alike as providing some rare insights into the character of this great man who had such an influence on the course of 19th Century American history.

This publication is the official newsletter of the New South Wales Chapter of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia. All inquiries regarding the Newsletter should be addressed to the Secretary/Treasurer of the Chapter by telephone on 9449 3720 or at PO Box 200, St Ives, NSW, 2075 or by e-mail to bpoconn@bigpond.com

Commanding the Official Surrender

This is an edited extract from a series of articles published in our Newsletter in 2003 and is considered relevant to the theme of our 2006 Conference.

In recounting the events of the official surrender ceremony of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox on April 12, 1865, many Civil War authors have indicated that the Union forces taking the surrender were commanded by Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain of "Little Round Top" fame. Indeed, no less an authority than James M McPherson in his *Battle Cry of Freedom* (p 850) repeats the Chamberlain in command story.

In a series of lectures, however, the eminent Civil War historian Gary W Gallagher of the University of Virginia has asserted that the officer in command of the Union forces at the official surrender of ANV was not Chamberlain but Major General Joseph J Bartlett, who was commanding the 1st Division of the Union's V Corps. Chamberlain commanded one of the three brigades in Bartlett's division and it was Chamberlain's brigade that the Confederates first encountered as they marched to the surrender ceremony.

In an attempt to track down the true story, Dr Gallagher was contacted by e-mail and his reply was prompt and most informative:

"...The best student of the Appomattox campaign and the events of April 9-12, is William Marvel, who has written two very deeply researched books about the subject. His most recent book, published last year and titled "Lee's Last Retreat: The Flight to Appomattox", discusses Chamberlain's claims to have commanded the Federals who received Lee's formal surrender on April 12 and concludes that Chamberlain who commanded just one brigade in Bartlett's division, later magnified his role

"Henceforth he (Chamberlain) would have it that he commanded the receiving troops in that illustrious ceremony – even that Ulysses Grant had personally chosen him for that honor (sic) – and from that inflated perspective he would remember offering the defeated foe a salute that banished sectional antagonism and launched the spirit of national reunion"

Marvel points out that Chamberlain's earliest descriptions of the ceremony make no mention of the salute or Gordon's response. Neither did any Confederates mention a salute. See pp. 193-95 of the book for the full discussion

This response from Gallagher is likely to be perceived by the many diehard Chamberlain fans as akin to blasphemy and they would wish to cling to McPherson's version of the official surrender as presented in his *Battle Cry of Freedom* tome.

At Paul Kensey's suggestion, McPherson was contacted by e-mail with a view to seeking some references to support his "Chamberlain in command" version of the surrender story.

Within four working days a response to our query was received from Dr McPherson in Princeton via e-mail. This response is presented in full below:

"I think Gallagher and Marvel are right. Bartlett had overall command of the troops at the official surrender ceremony and Chamberlain commanded only his brigade. Chamberlain's later claim that he was in official command of the surrender ceremonies seems to be a product of a faulty or inflated memory (emphasis added), but it does seem true that it was Chamberlain's decision to order his men to Carry Arms.

James McPherson"

As a postscript to this exchange of correspondence letters of thanks were sent to both Dr Gallagher and Dr McPherson expressing our delight that these eminent historians are willing to engage in discussion on Civil War issues with enthusiasts even in the antipodes.

Marvel's Book

Dr Gallagher's mention of William Marvel's book, as reported in the previous article, suggests that the short review of this book published in an earlier Newsletter should be re-printed. Here it is:

Few events in Civil War History have generated such deliberate mythmaking as the retreat that ended at Appomattox. The popular version of events is that Lee's Army, tattered and starving but devoted to their commander, found itself hopelessly surrounded through no fault of their beloved commander, who surrendered them rather than sacrifice their lives.

A new book, first published in 2002, contends that the South surrendered in a more disorderly and less noble fashion than hitherto believed. Masses of troops deserted their beloved Robert E Lee and Lee made some fatal mistakes of his own for which he hasn't been held accountable.

This book, *Lee's Last Retreat – The Flight to Appomattox* written by William Marvel and published by University of North Carolina Press is very well researched using contemporaneous source material and with a sceptical eye toward memoirs written well after the events they purport to describe. This book is definitely worth a read.

At present, a hardcover edition of Marvel's book may be purchased on-line through *Amazon.com* for US\$ 19:77 together with an additional US\$ 11:98 for package and handling. Readers will find that this outlay is well worth the expense.

2006 CONFERENCE PROGRAM

The Chapter's full-day Conference, scheduled for Saturday, April 8, 2006 at the Gordon Club, Chatswood, is to have the theme:

APPOMATTOX AND BEYOND

Consistent with this theme the Conference program has been prepared and is presented below. The speakers for the various presentations have now been finalised with Dr Frances Clarke, Lecturer in American History at the University of Sydney and Dr Angus Curry, La Trobe University, having accepted invitations to address the conference.

The proposed program is as follows:

8:45 – 9:15 am: Conference Registration

9:15 – 9:30 am: **Opening Remarks** - Stephen T Smith, United States Consul General

9:30 – 10:15 am: Presentation: ***Setting the Scene - The Last Days of the Army of Northern Virginia*** – Paul Spencer (South Australia)

10:15 – 11:00 am: Presentation: ***The Surrenders*** – John Cook

11:00 – 11:30 am: MORNING TEA

11:30 am – 12:30 pm: Presentation: ***The Lincoln Assassination and Its Aftermath***
Dr Angus Curry (La Trobe University, Victoria)

12:30 – 1:30 pm: LUNCH

1:30 – 2:30 pm: Keynote Address: ***Wounded Veterans and the Shifting Meanings of the Civil War*** - Dr Frances Clarke (University of Sydney)

2:30 – 3:30 pm: Presentation: ***The Politics and Practice of Reconstruction*** – Bruce Dennett, History Teacher, Baulkham Hills High School and former Recipient of the Premier's American Travelling Scholarship

3:30 – 4:15 pm: Video Presentation: ***The Emergence of the "Lost Cause" Mythology*** - featuring Dr Gary Gallagher (University of Virginia)

4:15 – 4:45 pm: Presentation: ***Appomattox Courthouse: The Finale*** – Paul Kensey

4:45 – 5:00 pm: **Closing Remarks**

In lieu of an afternoon tea break it is proposed that tea/coffee/OJ be available to Conference participants "on tap".