

# Sumter to Appomattox

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

Patron: Professor the Hon. Bob Carr

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Please visit our website [www.americancivilwar.asn.au](http://www.americancivilwar.asn.au)

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## A Message from Our Chairman

At our last meeting, our Program Director in his usual polished style set out to make the members envious of the June trip that several of us enjoyed visiting relevant and irrelevant sites in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. So far as I can tell, he was not without success. Thank you John.

One of the people in that tour group was Jane McDonald, an anaesthetist by profession. Her commentary and observations when we were visiting sites of field hospitals and improvised operating "theatres" alerted me to the potential of anaesthetics and surgery in the Civil War as an interesting perspective and story. It was apparently not as primitive as you might have assumed. I am pleased that Jane accepted an invitation to introduce us to the world of anaesthetics and surgery in the civil war era at our next meeting. You are allowed to be grateful that we were not involved.

Jannette Greenwood has been doing an excellent job with the newsletter and I encourage all members to assist her by offering contributions likely to be of interest to fellow members.

Included in this newsletter is an invitation to enrol in our course at the Sydney WEA starting on 30 October 2019. A special discount is available to Round Table members if you book before 21 September. I hope you can join us.

*Dan McIntyre*

## Our Next Meeting

Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> September

The Roseville Club

**Topic: Anaesthetics in the Civil War**

**Speaker: Dr Jane McDonald**

The Civil War saw many changes in warfare. It also saw the development for the first time of dedicated medical services and medical personnel, casualty evacuation, field hospitals as well as the development of new medical procedures. Despite the terrible images – so beloved of Hollywood - of surgery and amputations being conducted without anaesthetic, development of the speciality of anaesthesia was already under way by the time of the Civil War.

We are extremely fortunate to have as our speaker on this subject Dr Jane McDonald. Jane is an honours graduate in Medicine from the University of New South Wales and is currently a Senior anaesthetist at Westmead Hospital with a special interest in paediatric and obstetric anaesthesia. Jane has been a participant on the recent Battlefield Tour.

We hope you will find her presentation interesting and challenging.

*Arrive before 6.15 and order a bistro meal. Our meeting starts at 7pm.*

On our **Website** you will always find the date of our next meeting. Our Facebook page is also easily accessed from our website [www.americancivilwar.asn.au](http://www.americancivilwar.asn.au)

## Our Last Meeting

Members **John Verhoeven** and **John Morrison**, both participants on the tour, provided an interesting commentary on the various Southern locations they visited and their relationship to the Civil War.

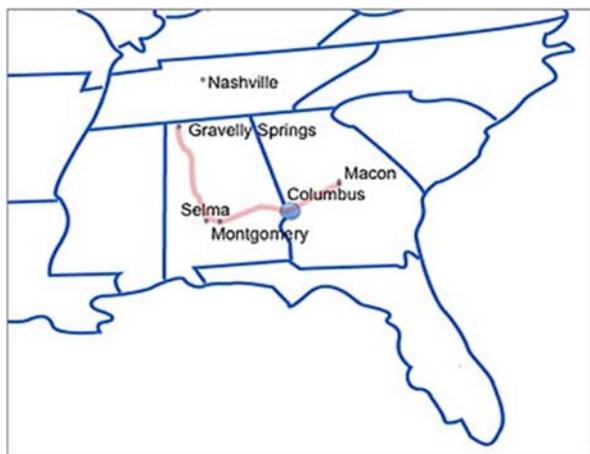
### **Battle Focus: The Battle of Columbus**

John Verhoeven

It had been suggested previously by one of our members that each meeting begin with the focus on a particular battle. John Verhoeven opened this segment with a short description of the last major military engagement of the Civil War, the Battle of Columbus, Georgia. John had gained new insights into this battle during a tour of the National Civil War Naval Museum in Columbus, which houses the remains of the CSS *Jackson*, one of the largest of the ironclad rams built in the South, at the Columbus Naval Yard.

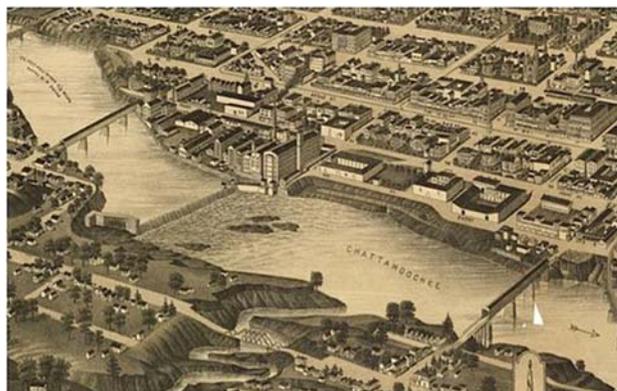
Columbus, founded in 1828, was second only to Richmond in manufacturing importance during the war. Situated on the Chattahoochee River, which flows into the Gulf of Mexico, it was an important port for cotton and textiles. Its industries expanded to supply the Confederate army with uniforms, cannons, machinery, firearms, swords, bayonets and munitions. It also had a Confederate Navy shipyard.

Union Brigadier General James H Wilson was ordered to lead a force of 13,500 cavalry through Alabama and Georgia in March and April 1865, to destroy the arsenal at Selma, and then proceed to destroy other arsenals and munitions and to cause any local Confederate forces to "disintegrate". Wilson's Raid commenced from Gravelly Springs, Alabama on 22 March, and by 15 April he was near Columbus (see map).



To attack Columbus and proceed through Georgia, Wilson needed to secure at least one of several bridges over the river, either at Columbus, where there were two covered bridges, or further north at West Point. Defending Columbus was Major General Howell Cobb, with about 3,500 men, mainly home guard units and civilian volunteers. Cobb decided to

defend the city on the high ground on the western side of the river, using trenches, breastworks and earthen forts to defend the two covered bridges. He also had the base of the bridges wrapped in cotton and doused in turpentine, to burn the bridges if other measures failed.



Although Lee had surrendered at Appomattox Court House on 9 April, this information had not reached the combatants at Columbus. About 2pm on Easter Sunday 16 April, Wilson's Raiders arrived at the river. One Division attacked the lower covered bridge, meeting little resistance. However, Confederates had removed bridge planks and set it alight, and the Division was forced to retreat at sunset.

Wilson then launched an assault on the upper bridge after nightfall, at 8pm, surprising the defenders. About 10pm, the defences on the western bank collapsed, and both Union and Confederate troops ran across the bridge. Confederate artillery held fire, not wanting to kill their own troops, and attempts to burn the bridge failed. Around 11pm, Wilson rode across the bridge, and Columbus fell.

The following day, Wilson ordered the destruction of every mill, factory, military building, trains, ships and goods, and the naval dockyard. The ironclad CSS *Jackson* was torched and set adrift, burning down to the waterline as it drifted downriver. Casualties included 60 Union and 151 Confederate troops, and 1,600 Confederate prisoners.

Wilson's Raiders moved on to take Macon, Georgia, without resistance. 10 days after the Battle of Columbus, Confederate General Joseph E Johnston surrendered the Confederate armies at Bennett Place in North Carolina.

### **Atlanta to the sea and a few sidelines**

John Morrison

John Morrison gave a wide-ranging and lively presentation of various high points of the tour, pausing throughout to respond to observations from members. John's initial comment was that, when travelling through the South and interacting with historians, he was led to new insights regarding the validity of the Southern cause as supporting arguments were often cogent and persuasive.

This summary does not attempt to cover the tour in detail but to highlight points that John brought up. He referred to several interesting individuals he had met. One was the guide on the cruise of the Mississippi undertaken by several members; Bertram Hayes-Davis, the great-grandson of Jefferson Davis. Their guide in Tennessee at La Grange and Shiloh, was Kirk Field who termed himself a 'portrayer' rather than a re-enactor. His portrayal of General Grant was striking, including the use of a crutch to reflect Grant's use of one as a result of having been kicked by a horse the night before Shiloh.



John spent time describing exhibits at the National Civil War Naval Museum at Port Columbus. These included the C.S.S. Jackson, retrieved after being submerged in mud for over a century, and models of the U.S.S. Monitor and C.S.S. Virginia (formerly the U.S.S. Merrimack).

Another place visited was the prison at Andersonville, which is not just remembered as a prison but in fact has modern significance as a memorial to all POWs. John commented on the peacefulness of the cemetery with its closely-spaced headstones, a feature similar to cemeteries beside other prisons such as Elmira, Rock Island and Johnson's Island.

Savannah was the location of the end of the March to the Sea and now has helpful signs erected by the Historical Society. One of the highlights in Savannah were the maps related to this period discovered hidden on walls behind wallpaper of the building in which Union Officers were billeted (today it is a restaurant).

John and audience members also discussed fortifications and the disadvantages of traditional stone forts when faced with the new rifled artillery of the period, as compared to earlier smooth bore artillery. Fort Pulaski, one of three forts protecting Savannah, was a brick-fortified structure, and was bombarded by rifled cannon and, unable to withstand the onslaught,

was forced to surrender in April 1862. However, Fort McAlister, another of the forts protecting Savannah, was an earthworks fort and was able to resist bombardment for some time. Another elaborate brick fort which could not defend itself against bombardment of cannons was the famous Fort Sumter, in many ways the place where the Civil War began, much of which was reduced to rubble in a few days.



John discussed the beauty of Charleston S. C. Despite being the cradle of South Carolina's (and much of the South) secession, it survived well as it had not been on the route to the sea. Highlights of the visit to Charleston were a visit to Fort Sumter and a viewing of the restoration of *the H.L. Hunley*, the first submarine to sink a surface ship in combat.



The tour ended at Bennett Place State Historic Site at Durham N.C. where the last surrender of a major Confederate army took place. General Joseph E. Johnston surrendering to General William Sherman, whom John described as the first modern war general, with his 'total war' approach in which all means of support were destroyed, including that by the civilian population. This was in contrast to the previous Napoleonic style.

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 of the Chapter by telephone on 0411 745 704 or by e-mail at:

[secretary@americancivilwar.asn.au](mailto:secretary@americancivilwar.asn.au)

## *Background to Our Next Meeting*

### **Anaesthesia in the Civil War**

*Thanks to member Jane McDonald, who took part in the Tour.*



*Picture: A soldier about to have a leg amputation under chloroform anaesthesia*

The first public demonstration of anaesthesia occurred in 1846 at Massachusetts General Hospital when ether was administered by a dentist, William Thomas Green Morton, to provide anaesthesia. The surgeon was John Collins Warren and the patient Gilbert Abbott. The patient was sufficiently insensible to have a tumour removed from his neck. Later, he said that though he felt some scraping he felt no pain. News of this quickly spread around the world.

A year later Chloroform was introduced as an anaesthetic by James Young Simpson in Edinburgh. By the time of the American Civil War, anaesthesia was widely practised although not fully established, and much surgery was still done without anaesthesia. However, due to the mass casualties of the Civil War and its successful use in many surgeries, it became more widely understood and accepted as a revolutionary medical advancement.

Chloroform was the preferred anaesthetic as a smaller quantity was needed and it worked rapidly. Ether was slower in onset and required more volume. Ether also was flammable, which made it dangerous in an era where gas and candle lighting was used. Chloroform was usually administered by placing the anaesthetic on a sponge at the top of a cone with the open end over the patient's nose and mouth.

Surgeons worked quickly and operations were completed in a few minutes. Most surgery was for amputations. The practice at the time was that any limb where the bone was shattered was amputated.

Ether and chloroform were manufactured by both sides in the Civil War but mostly in the North and also imported by the Confederate Army from Britain. When anaesthesia was not used, this was most commonly

due to lack of supply, which became a problem for the Confederate Army due to the blockade.

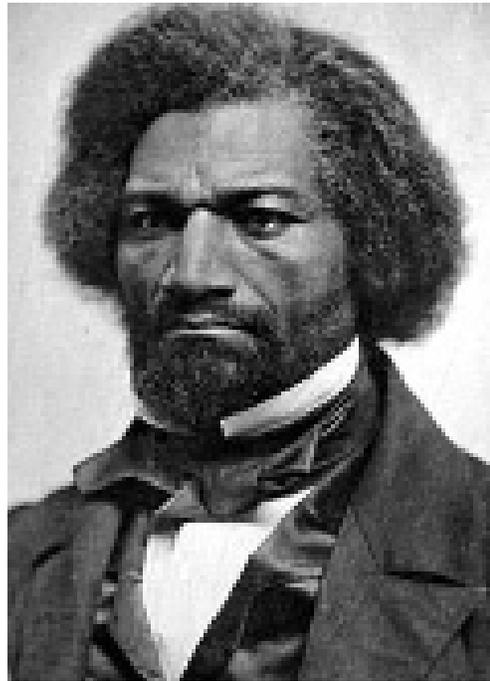
It is estimated that 80,000 anaesthetics were administered during the War with few deaths attributed to the anaesthetic.

Stonewall Jackson had his left arm amputated under chloroform anaesthesia in May 1863 after The Battle of Chancellorsville and described it as "an infinite blessing".

## *Civil War Profile*

### **Frederick Douglass**

*Thanks to member Dan Howard*



It would not be an overstatement to say that Frederick Douglass (whose surname originally was Bailey) is one of the most important figures in American history. His legacy, which resonates strongly even today, was to stand up and advocate fearlessly for the abolition of slavery and for the right of the American negro to be treated as equal citizens under the Constitution, which, perhaps ironically given some of the provisions it contained (the three-fifths clause and the fugitive slave clause), he regarded as a document that shone a beacon of hope and promise for the human rights of all. He ranks pre-eminent in the history of abolitionism and deserves to be accorded the same stature in the fight against racism as Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela.

This remarkable man was born into plantation slavery in about (he never could be certain as there was no record of his birth) February, 1817, at Tuckahoe, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. His father was an unknown white man, possibly his master, and his mother was a slave who died when he was only seven. Douglass gives a poignant description of how he never saw his mother in the daylight, as she

worked at a property some distance away and he only remembers her holding him at night when he was sleeping, after she returned from work. She died young and he was not told of her death until long afterwards and could not attend her funeral.

This is related in Douglass's autobiography, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, published in 1845. In this book, Douglass gives a number of eye-witness accounts of the grim and violent life of a plantation slave; he describes how he witnessed his master tie up his Aunt Hester – a beautiful and proud negress whom his master had been sexually abusing – by her wrists and then, making her stand on a stool with her tied hands suspended from a large hook in a ceiling joist, whipped her mercilessly because she had shown interest in a slave man. He gives several descriptions of slaves being shot or beaten to death by owners and overseers for minor misbehaviour, with no criminal responsibility being charged against the perpetrators, who faced no meaningful consequences.

Douglass fared somewhat better when he was sent after his mother's death to live with the Auld family in Baltimore as a 'house' slave to help look after the young Thomas Auld. Mrs Sophia Auld, who had never a slave before, was thought by Douglass to be one of the kindest white women he had ever known; she was full of charm and treated him very well, even teaching him the basics of how to read. But Douglass describes how that all changed after her husband forbade her to teach him reading as this would make a slave unmanageable and worthless and Douglass, hearing this rebuke, began to realise that learning through reading was a key to freedom - "from that moment on, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom" Douglass writes. Douglass gives many examples of the corrupting influence of slavery upon slaveholders and describes the insidious effect this ultimately had upon the once sweet-natured Mrs Auld, "whose tender heart became stone".

Douglass made friends with white children whom he met in the street and enlisted their aid to help him improve his reading and writing skills.

In 1838, after a previous failed attempt, Douglass, now age 21, escaped to the free state of New York disguised as a seaman. He was joined there by his fiancée, who was a free black. Out of fear of being recaptured, he changed his name from Bailey to Douglass, after a heroic character in Sir Walter Scott's poem 'The Lady of the Lake'.

In 1841, Douglass gave a spellbinding speech at an abolitionist meeting and fast became an influential speaker in abolitionist circles, and his 1845 biography became a best seller. The first edition contained effusively complimentary forewords by leading abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and by Wendell Phillips. He travelled to Great Britain and Ireland on a speaking tour and whilst he was still there as a fugitive slave, supporters purchased his freedom, and Douglass returned to the United States in 1847, a free man. Using funds he earned from his speaking tour, Douglass started an abolitionist newspaper 'The North

Star' (later called 'Frederick Douglass' Newspaper') with its first issue published on 3 December, 1847. The north star in the night sky was a chief navigation aid for runaway slaves heading north to freedom. He published this until he left for another lecture tour of England in November 1859; it is possible that his absence in England saved him from becoming entangled in the recriminations after John Brown's capture at Harper's Ferry, as Douglass was well acquainted with Brown and letters from Douglass to Brown were amongst Brown's possessions after his capture. Although Douglass did not agree with Brown's plans, their past association, and the fact that Douglass's own views were moving away from advocating a purely non-violent approach to ending slavery, had the potential to embroil him in suspicion as a possible conspirator.

Prior to 1851, Douglass had been a follower and adherent of William Lloyd Garrison and his belief that the US Constitution was a 'proslavery' and that therefore abolitionists should support 'disunion', that is, free states leave the Union; Garrison also advocated that abolitionists should refuse to vote under a proslavery constitution – a stance that many abolitionists thought too extreme. But by 1851, Douglass had changed his views and now considered that the Constitution could be interpreted correctly as an antislavery document, describing it as 'a glorious liberty document'; he called for a political war against slavery. Throughout the 1850s, Douglass argued against all forms of legal discrimination and he became renowned as the foremost black reformer of his times.

In 1852, Douglass delivered one of his most famous speeches, "What, to a slave, is the Fourth of July?" In this he said:

*What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy — a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages.*

When the Civil War came and Fort Sumter fell, Douglass considered it 'a tremendous revolution in all things pertaining to the possible future of the coloured people of the United States'. However, he became critical of Abraham Lincoln for not doing more with the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, in particular, failing to give the right to vote to ex-slaves, particularly after they had fought bravely in the war.

On April 14, 1876, Douglass was invited to give the oration at the unveiling of the emancipation memorial in Washington DC, before a large gathering including

President U.S. Grant. The speech is a revealing one, a blend of praise and honest recognition of the fact that Lincoln was a 'White man's president'. Here is an extract that gives a sense of the tone of the speech:

*I have said that President Lincoln was a white man, and shared the prejudices common to his countrymen towards the coloured race... Had he put the abolition of slavery before the salvation of the Union, he would have inevitably driven from him a powerful class of the American people and rendered resistance to rebellion impossible. Viewed from the genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined.*

*Though Mr. Lincoln shared the prejudices of his white fellow-countrymen against the Negro, it is hardly necessary to say that in his heart of hearts he loathed and hated slavery. The man who could say, "Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war shall soon pass away, yet if God wills it continue till all the wealth piled by two hundred years of bondage shall have been wasted, and each drop of blood drawn by the lash shall have been paid for by one drawn by the sword, the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether," gives all needed proof of his feeling on the subject of slavery. He was willing, while the South was loyal, that it should have its pound of flesh, because he thought that it was so nominated*

*in the bond; but farther than this no earthly power could make him go.*

There is a good 5 minute video produced by the History Channel about Douglass and Lincoln at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoqR-d\\_a\\_jc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoqR-d_a_jc)

Until his death in 1895, Douglass continued to advocate for civil rights and equality, including supporting the rights of women, of whom he once said in an 1848 speech:

*"In this denial of the right to participate in government, not merely the degradation of woman and the perpetuation of a great injustice happens, but the maiming and repudiation of one-half of the moral and intellectual power of the government of the world."*

#### **New part of future meetings**

Acting on a good suggestion by Tom at our last meeting, we will devote ten minutes to a curious aspect of the Civil War. Tom's suggestion is to devote ten minutes at each meeting to a specific battle or event.

Thank you to all who have contributed by way of presentations, or agreed to do so, and by way of contributions to and production of the newsletter.

We welcome your suggestions!



## **Origins of the American Civil War - How did it come to this?**

Presented by our Round Table

Our course goes back to the origins of the colonies and the values of the Revolution to explore how the two sides came to war in 1861.

You are invited to attend our course starting **30 October** at WEA Sydney, 72 Bathurst Street.

All members of our Round Table are offered a **15% discount** on the full course fee.

To receive the discount use the discount code **SPRING19** before 21st September.

**Enrol now!**

To enrol follow the link: [www.weasydney.com.au/course/OACW](http://www.weasydney.com.au/course/OACW)