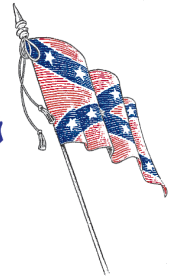




# THE OFFICIAL RECORDS

OF THE ROBERT E. LEE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF CENTRAL NJ



## JULY 11, 2019 MEETING

**NEW LOCATION THIS MONTH:** *Iselin Public Library, 7 pm–1081 Green St., Iselin*

### WAR? WHAT WAR?

*Speaker: Matt Borowick*

This month's presentation is titled *War? What War?* The study of American history during the period of 1861-1865 usually focuses on the "Xs and Os" of battlefields, armies and battles. Yet, the same period saw some of the most active federal legislation ever, much of which remains with us today.

Unencumbered by Southern opposition in the House and Senate, the Lincoln Administration pursued a number of domestic economic policies that reflected the Republican party's Whig roots. This unique presentation will discuss some of the most pressing non-military issues Abraham Lincoln and his cabinet addressed while they tried to keep the Union as one.

Our speaker this month is Matthew Borowick. He has had a lifelong interest in the American Civil War, dating back to his days as a first-grader when he took his copy of *The Golden Book of the Civil War* to school daily. In 1992 he joined the Robert E. Lee Civil War Round Table of Central New Jersey, serving as its newsletter editor, advisory board member, and webmaster. Later, he helped establish the Civil War Library & Research Center and was its first Executive Director



*Matt Borowick*

Today, Matt is a regular columnist for the well-regarded *Civil War News*, serving as the author of *Round Table Review*, which describes best practices of Civil War round tables throughout the country. In 2010, he authored and published *The Civil War Round Table Handbook: The Indispensable Guide to Running Yours Right*, which is available on Kindle at Amazon.com.

He serves as a volunteer at Manassas National Battlefield Park. Matt earned a BA in Economics and an MBA in Finance from Seton Hall University and is employed by Seton Hall as its Interim Vice President for Advancement. He and his wife Kathy, who has been to more Civil War battlefields than she cares to admit, live in Monmouth Junction, NJ with their four children.

## NEWS AND NOTES

\* The books for this month's Book Raffle are *Shiloh and the Western Campaign of 1862* by O. Edward Cunningham, *Battle Cry of Freedom* by James McPherson, and *The Maps of Gettysburg* by Bradley Gottfried.

\* We want to hear from you! Any member who has recently taken an interesting Civil War related trip, or has read a good Civil War book should consider sharing the information with the rest of the RE Lee CWRT members. You can e-mail the information to newsletter editor Chris Luzhak at [CJLuzhak@gmail.com](mailto:CJLuzhak@gmail.com) or you can mail it in to the Round Table at R.E. Lee CWRT, 1162 St. George Avenue, Suite 194, Avenel, NJ 07001.

## President's Column

What an awesome way to start the month of June. We were privileged to have one of the nation's most preeminent authorities of Civil War history, Dr. James Robertson, as our featured speaker. He eloquently spoke to us about Robert E. Lee's efforts to bring about a peaceful reconciliation between the North and South after the Civil War. A full room of Civil War enthusiasts hung on his every word and when his presentation concluded, he received a standing ovation from our members. Thank you, Dr. Robertson, for making your June 3 visit another memorable and educational experience which will long be talked about and cherished by our Round Table.



*June speaker James I. "Bud" Robertson explores the post-Civil War career of Robert E. Lee*

On June 8 and 9 we visited Antietam and Shepherdstown Battlefields with our tour guide and licensed Park Ranger Kevin Pawlak. Everyone on the tour was blown away by Kevin's extensive knowledge of the battles and his superb presentations. Our June 8 evening culminated with a dinner at BJ's Restaurant and Brewhouse in Hagerstown, MD, where we were also introduced to Kevin's lovely wife Kristen who is also a Civil War enthusiast and preservation editor for *Emerging Civil War*. Thank you, Kevin, for making our tour not only educational but extremely enjoyable as well.



*Round Table members tour the Antietam and Shepherdstown battlefields*

A \$200 check was presented to Kevin on behalf of our Round Table as a donation to the Shepherdstown Battlefield Preservation Association. The donation was made at the Ferry Hill Plantation historical site in Sharpsburg, MD. Kevin thanked us for our donation and said he would deliver our check to the appropriate authorities with our best wishes.



*Round Table President Tom Kuzma (right) presents Park Ranger Kevin Pawlak with a \$200 check to the Shepherdstown Battlefield Preservation Association*

Congratulations to the winners of our June book raffle: Tom Bobenchik (*To the North Anna River*); Debbie Jaeger (*Stonewall Jackson: The Good Soldier*); Tom Williamson (*From Manassas to Appomattox*); Anna Palfey (*General Stephen D. Lee*); Joseph Bielak (*Fighting for General Lee: General Rufus Barringer*); and Tom Kuzma (*The Battle for Spotsylvania Courthouse and Road to Yellow Tavern*).

Our next meeting will be Thursday, August 8 at 7 pm **at the Iselin branch library** located at 1081 Green Street in Iselin. Our speaker for the evening will be Craig Breneiser who will speak to us about the year 1863: *Afloat—A Year of Destiny*. In closing I would like to wish all our members a very happy and safe Fourth of July.

—Tom Kuzma

## *Civil War Quiz*

1. What Radical Republican insisted on being carried into the courtroom to watch the impeachment trial of Andrew Johnson even though he was deathly ill?
2. Who said, “The Rebel bullet that can kill me has not yet been molded.”
3. Who was the running mate of Stephen Douglass in 1860?
4. Who said, “I know General Grant better than any other person in this country can know him ...and now I tell you what I know, he cannot govern this country.”
5. Who did Winfield Scott describe as “...a bulldog with his ears pinned back?”

—Submitted by Judi Breitstein

*Last month's answers: 1. Bvt. Maj. Gen. George Armstrong Custer 2. Harvard College 3. Up to 50, or half a company 4. John Singleton Mosby 5. It housed the headquarters of both the Confederate Army and Navy*

## **This Month in the Civil War**

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>7/21/61:</b>  | Battle of First Bull Run                              |
| <b>7/1/62:</b>   | Battle of Malvern Hill                                |
| <b>7/22/62:</b>  | Lincoln presents Emancipation Proclamation to Cabinet |
| <b>7/1-3/63:</b> | Battle of Gettysburg                                  |
| <b>7/4/63:</b>   | Fall of Vicksburg                                     |
| <b>7/9/64:</b>   | Battle of the Monocacy                                |

## GRAVE OF THE MONTH

# *The Fox Sisters*

*By Judith Breitstein*

John and Margaret Fox resumed their marriage after many years apart due to his drunkenness. Now sober, John purchased a small house in Hydesville, New York, population 40. John and Margaret's daughter, Leah, older than their other children by some 20 years, had been widowed and now lived and earned her living in Rochester teaching music. Their son, Dave, worked on a farm in Auburn. The two youngest daughters, Maggie, 14, and Kate, 11, lived with them.



*The Fox Sisters*

On December 18, 1847, the family moved into their new home. The house was rumored to be haunted. Previous residents claimed to have heard sounds of furniture moving, windows opening and closing, raps and thuds. Knocks were heard at the front door but when it was opened, no one was there. Odd sounds kept the Foxes awake their first few weeks. Then on March 31, 1848, Kate snapped her fingers two times and ordered Mr. Splitfoot, a euphemism for the devil in the 1840s, "to do as I do." Immediately, two snaps were heard. In the following days, Maggie joined her sister in channeling the raps, snaps and communicating with the dead.

The heyday of Spiritualism had begun in the tiny town of Hydesville, born in the minds of two greedy little girls and fostered by their avaricious older sister. It didn't stop growing until all three sisters were dead.

The girls had worked out a system to communicate with the spirits: one rap meant "yes," two raps meant "no." A number of raps would correspond with a letter of the alphabet. Hordes of people began descending on the Fox home demanding to speak to loved ones who were on "the other side of the veil." It became impossible to live normally with bereaved neighbors banging on the doors.

The Foxes sent Kate to live with her brother, Dave, in Auburn. Maggie took refuge with Leah. The girls began to have "sittings," later known as "séances," in their new homes. So many people were clamoring to see them that they rented a hall that sat 400. The girls put on their demonstration. No fraud was detected but afterwards, Kate and Maggie were taken backstage, disrobed and examined. Nothing was found that could have produced the sounds.

Leah now announced that she, too, was a medium. With herself as manager, she arranged for the Fox sisters to tour the United States. Their first stop was New York City. They charged a dollar a person and offered private meetings for their wealthier patrons. Horace Greeley invited the sisters to his home. He had lost his five-year-old son to typhoid fever and his wife was a great believer in this new religion of Spiritualism. It was through Greeley that the girls met and gave readings to some of the most well-known people of the era, William Cullen Bryant, James Fennimore Cooper, William Lloyd Garrison and P.T. Barnum. Though Harriet Beecher Stowe claimed to distrust mediums, she could not pass up the chance to speak to her dead children. After a séance in the White House with the Fox sisters, Jane, the wife of President Franklin Pierce, claimed to have seen her lost son, Bennie, two nights in succession. Afterwards, she said that "her soul felt calm."

While Leah remained in New York giving séances, Kate and Maggie continued their tour. They began to include music and spirit writing in the séances. At times, the raps grew violent and poltergeists were said to attack members of the

audience. More than once, Kate and Maggie were physically attacked by townspeople and run out of town. Yet in spite of the distrust and hostility towards mediums, the movement kept growing.

In 1857, Maggie met her future husband, the Arctic explorer, Elisha Kent Kane. He offered to send her to school if she'd quit the tour and convert to Catholicism. They married in a secret Quaker ceremony which did not include a minister or the taking of any vows. Kane died suddenly that same year. His family refused to accept Maggie or allow her to attend the funeral. She began drinking to drown her sorrows. Desperate for money, she soon joined Kate on the stage again. Meanwhile, for several months Kate had been living with the Greeley family. On his death bed, Greeley blessed the Fox sisters insisting, "They have prepared me for this hour."

It has been estimated that over 750,000 soldiers died during and shortly after the Civil War. Mary Lincoln opened the door to Spiritualism on a mass scale in the country when she invited mediums into the White House after little Willie's death. Mediums grew rich from emotionally vulnerable parents who wanted to contact their lost sons and locate their bodies. The majority of mediums were women. It was often their first chance to exercise leadership unencumbered by male watchdogs. The thought of women blatantly displaying themselves on stage was anathema to many. But now, women began to give public lectures to mixed audiences, something that was unheard of before this time. Many blamed the new "Spiritualist religion" on "female insanity," ie: a woman's reproductive system. Doctors blamed the madness on tilted uteruses. In February 1872, Mary Todd Lincoln contacted Maggie Fox to hold a séance so she could speak to her husband, the deceased President. Robert Lincoln used this incident during his mother's insanity trial as an example of her mental instability.

Kate and Maggie had become famous beyond their wildest dreams. Money was pouring in but the two sisters began to resent Leah for forcing them to work so hard. Leah pushed Maggie hardest as she was more talented than Kate. Leah had become an astute business woman but competition was eating away at their profits. Older and savvy women were entering the field and using new tricks

aided by the use of modern technology. While some truly believed in spirits, others were without conscience, knowingly cashing in on the grief of families. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the deaths of children under five years old accounted for more than half the deaths in the United States. The number of Civil War deaths were appalling. Death was everywhere.

Perhaps from overwork or guilt, Kate joined Maggie in drinking heavily before and after their private sittings and sessions on stage.

Sensing an untapped market, the sisters traveled to England where they soon had a large following. In December 1872, Kate married Henry Jencken, a devout believer in Spiritualism. In 1885, they returned to the United States. Henry Jencken died of a stroke that same year. It began to be difficult for the sisters to find work due to their drinking. In 1888, Kate was arrested for drunk and disorderly conduct and her two sons were taken from her. Leah, abandoned by her first husband, widowed by her second, had married her third husband, Daniel Underhill, and turned her back on her sisters. Angry at Leah, and backed up by Kate, Maggie accepted \$1500 to appear on the stage of the new Academy of Music on East 14<sup>th</sup> Street in NYC and debunk Spiritualism.

On October 21, 1888, Maggie began, "I am here tonight as one of the founders of Spiritualism to denounce it as an absolute falsehood ..., as the flimsiest of superstitions, the most wicked blasphemy known to this world." She went on to relate how she and Kate conjured up their "special effects," tying apples to strings and bumping them on the floor to cause rappings and thumps. With practice, they learned to manipulate the joints of their fingers, knees, toes and ankles to make raps and loud pops. Maggie took off a shoe and sock and gave a demonstration. She explained that she had learned to do "spirit writing" using her feet. In the audience, Kate applauded.

Spiritualists condemned the confession. The newspapers said it was the "death blow" to Spiritualism. One year later, destitute, Maggie tried to recant her confession and work at a séance table again. She was unsuccessful.

Kate drank herself to death. She was 55 when she died on July 2, 1892. Maggie followed her a year later on March 8, 1893, aged 59, also dying from complications due to alcoholism. Both penniless, their common grave in Cypress Hill Cemetery in Brooklyn was paid for by friends.



*Kate and Maggie's grave, Cypress Hill Cemetery, Brooklyn NY*

Leah died on November 1, 1890, aged 77. She is buried in Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn. After their deaths, the movement died away.



*Leah's grave, Green Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn NY*

*Correction to the May 2019 Grave of the Month— William "Grumble" Jones: When Turner Ashby was killed in 1862, Jones took over command of Ashby's brigade. While the column mentions this brigade as the "7<sup>th</sup> Virginia Laurel Brigade," it was not known by that name until the winter of 1863-1864. Thanks to Jim Donovan for his sharp (and scholarly) eye!*

## Who Am I?

My mother was arrested before I was born. She had killed a freedman who had spoken disrespectfully to her. At her trial, she was acquitted after one flutter of her eyelashes.

I was born on March 22, 1817 in Warrenton, North Carolina. I had 11 siblings. I attended the prestigious Warrenton Male Academy. Though my father had a prosperous construction business, I was teased by my classmates, the sons of plantation owners, for my "working class" background. The fact that my mother had been held in prison added to my humiliation. In the years to come, I never spoke her name aloud. By the time I was ten, my father had decided on a career at West Point for me. My oldest brother, John, was a state legislator and paved the

way for my admittance. My brother, Thomas, was to serve as the governor of North Carolina and the Attorney General of the Confederacy.

I graduated fifth out of 50 in the class of 1837. I was ambitious and relished the thought of going to war and making a name for myself. I was said to have saved the Army when I fought under General Zachary Taylor in Mexico. At the Battle of Buena Vista, I held off a frontal attack until Colonel Jefferson Davis arrived with a defense. My troops did not love me, believing me to be too harsh a disciplinarian. Twice, attempts were made on my life, once one of my men rolled a lit cannonball under my cot.

Congressman David Outlaw had suggested to his wife that I be honored on my return home. He wrote that this man "...must in his heart despise those who were formerly disposed to sneer at his family as 'plebeians'." When I returned to Warrenton, the same citizens who had laughed and bullied me as a child now presented me with a sword.

Shortly after, on a tour of the south, I met the sugar heiress, lovely 23-year-old Eliza Brooks Ellis, known to all as "Elise." We were married at her home, Evergreen Plantation, on June 7, 1849 in Thibodaux, Louisiana. We began our lives by moving from one dismal frontier fort to another.

On the frontier, I served as both quartermaster and post commander. People found me "disputatious." When I commissioned supplies, I often denied them to myself! My commander once barked, "My God, you have argued with everyone in the Army and now you are arguing with yourself."

Living in the Indian territories was too hard on my gently-reared wife. All my requests for transfers were denied. I had said I would leave the army if I ever met a rich woman who would marry me. On January 3, 1856, I resigned from the military and was able to purchase a sugar plantation about three miles from Thibodaux. I ran my plantation with discipline and military efficiency. We made a profit our very first year in business. We had 105 slaves and none of my workers ever complained to me.

Elise and I were never blessed with children.

When the Civil War began, I rushed to my first appointment in Pensacola without even taking time to kiss Elise good-bye. I rose to become a principal commander in the Western Theater. My troops were some of the best trained in the army, but were not fond of me. Neither were my fellow officers. Few people were, it seemed. I have been called everything from argumentative to tyrant, mediocre, acerbic, polarizing, martinet, quick to offend and defend, thorny and "old pineapple." My official title though seemed to veer between "The Most Hated Man in the Confederacy" and "The Worst General in the Confederate States."

For a period of 17 months, I only met with defeat. My subordinates had no faith in me. Several senior officers began to refuse my orders. In 1862, my generals, Leonidas Polk and Kirby Smith, called for my removal. Generals Longstreet and D.H. Hill signed a petition asking for my recall.

When a young soldier under my command reported that Union General William Rosecrans was retreating, he was closely questioned as to how he was sure. He reported, "I've been with 'General X' the whole campaign and have experience on knowing what a retreat looks like!"

At Chickamauga, I was blamed for not pressing my advantage. In 1863, after the disastrous Chattanooga campaign, my subordinates again begged President Davis to have me removed. I was in particularly low spirits as my younger brother, William, had been mortally wounded there. I believe that to save my reputation, Davis made me his military advisor. On our way to Richmond, we stopped at Warm Springs. Elise had been suffering for a year with recurrences of typhoid fever and I had been constantly ill with migraines, malarial fevers, headaches and dyspepsia. I worked with Davis until I was called back to active service a year later.

In 1862, our home had been confiscated by the Federal Army. It then served as a shelter for homeless freed people. After the war, Elise and I lived with her brother on his plantation in Alabama for a short time but we found the isolation unbearable. We moved to New Orleans where I obtained work at the New Orleans Waterworks. As Chief Engineer, I built a drainage and levy system that has lasted for over 150 years. For my troubles, I was replaced by a former slave during

Reconstruction. After a series of low paying jobs, we moved to Galveston, Texas, where I worked as a railroad inspector.

On September 27, 1876, while walking in town, I suddenly found myself falling to the ground. I was carried into a drugstore where I died ten minutes later. I was 59 years old.

I am buried in Magnolia Cemetery in Mobile, Alabama. People have reported seeing a ghostly light on the spot in the street in Galveston where I died. Who am I?

—Submitted by Judi Breistein

*Last month's answer: Brig. Gen. John Wolcott Phelps, U.S.A.*



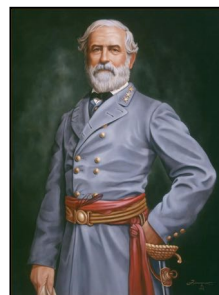
**NOTE: NEW MEETING LOCATION THIS MONTH!** Our July meeting will be held on **THURSDAY, JULY 11** at the **Iselin Public Library, 1081 Green St., Iselin.**

### Vision Statement

With the Civil War being a defining event in the history of the United States and a continuing influence on our society in general, the Robert E. Lee Civil War Round Table of Central New Jersey is dedicated to preserving and expanding knowledge about — and understanding of — this seminal event.

### Mission Statement

Our mission is to serve our members by striving to reach, with resources available, the goals set forward in the Vision Statement. This would be achieved, as finances allow, by: holding meetings, seminars and round tables; offering speakers who are experts in some aspect of the Civil War; encouraging nonpartisan, nonpolitical discussion and dialogue while honoring all those involved in the conflict; contributing toward the preservation of battlefields and important historical sites for future generations; providing eyes-on/hands-on/feet-on first-hand experiences by arranging field trips to battlefields and historical sites and by sponsoring living-history/reenactment events; enhancing communication by publishing a newsletter and maintaining a website; and operating a dedicated library/research center available to members, serious scholars and the general public.



*The Official Records* is the monthly newsletter of the RE LEE CWRT of Central New Jersey.

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**ROBERT E. LEE AND  
THE QUEST FOR PEACE**

*Robert E. Lee CWRT  
June 3, 2019*

**Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr.**



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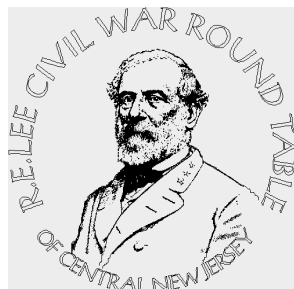
**Thomas Kuzma**



**Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr. & Henry F. Ballone**



**Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr. & Thomas Kuzma**



# ***THE ROBERT E. LEE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF CENTRAL NEW JERSEY***

**SCHEDULE FOR 2018 – 2019**

- 9-10-18 Paul Lader **M.O.L.L.U.S.**  
10-1-18 Paul Kahan **Presidency of U.S. Grant**  
11-5-18 Rick Trimble **Major General Isaac R. Trimble, CSA**  
12-3-18 James Remsen **Embattled Freedom**  
1-7-19 Jay Jorgensen **Fighting with Jackson**  
2-4-19 Andie Waskie **G.A.R.**  
3-4-19 Jim Hedtke **Civil War Myths**  
4-1-19 Martin Mosho **Women in the Civil War**  
5-6-19 Ralph Siegel **The Peach Orchard Fight**  
6-3-19 James I. "Bud" Robertson **TBA**  
7-10-19 Matt Borowick **Civil War Firsts**  
8-7-19 Craig Breneiser **1863 – Afloat – A Year of Destiny**

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**Regiment Commander - \$100**, includes dues membership for the year, free book raffle ticket at each meeting, & tour at Gettysburg

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Dues: Regular Member **\$35**

Associate Member **\$25** (75 miles outside of Woodbridge)

Student Member **\$20**

Fill in info below and send in with dues to the address below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Enclosed is my dues of \$\_\_\_\_\_, plus an optional donation of \$\_\_\_ for the Library & Research Center.

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