

The First Defenders Civil War Round Table Newsletter

June 2025, the 28th Campaign



www.firstdefenderscwrt.us

President's Message

WHAT IF HE WAS NOT DRUNK?

Ulysses S. Grant had a drinking problem. So it was reported during the Civil War, and many writers echo that sentiment to this day. Some said he had a weakness for alcohol, some said he drank from loneliness or boredom and some said he simply could not tolerate liquor. Most reports were related to the reporter by those who observed Grant to be inebriated. He was said to be found in a drunken state. Sometimes he disappeared in his tent or went off alone for hours to recover. Curiously, there are few, if any, eyewitness accounts to his drinking.

While serving at Fort Humboldt in Eureka, California, prior to the Civil War, Grant was accused by his senior officer of being so much under the influence as to be unable to perform his duties. There were no witnesses to this drinking, but he was given the choice to resign or face court martial. He left the army.

Grant was alleged to have been drunk and caught off guard at Shiloh. When the Confederate army in Vicksburg surrendered, he was seen with a case of champagne, intending to celebrate with his staff. In neither case was there a witness to his drinking. The allegations continued throughout the war. Henry Halleck sent James McPherson to spy on Grant. McPherson reported him to be disciplined and orderly. Later, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton sent Charles Dana on the same mission. Dana reported Grant's behavior in the most positive terms finding no evidence of drinking.

Most of the accusations against Grant appear to have come from jealous fellow officers, news hungry reporters and political enemies. Fortunately for the Union, President Lincoln stood by Grant and was rewarded with victories. Lincoln may have even said that he wished he knew what Grant drank as he would like to buy the same for his other generals. Yet even this support by Lincoln may be lending credence to unfair allegations. What if drinking was not the source of Grant's problems?

Grant suffered from migraine attacks enduring them his entire life. In the nineteenth century, that term was unknown was simply referred to in everyday terms as a "sick headache." Headache sufferers were deemed to be weak of mind and

body. In reality, a migraine attack is a whole-body experience, not simply a headache. Symptoms include headache, yawning, blurred vision, poor concentration, sensitivity to light, sounds and smells, emotional disturbance and, worst of all, nausea (vomiting). I can attest, as can many others, that if you entered a room and found one person to be a hung over drunk and the another to be a person suffering a migraine attack, you would be hard-pressed to tell the difference.

In the last four decades, medical science has begun to take migraine episodes seriously, and effective drugs have been developed for treatment. Only recently have some targeted, preventative drugs been released. None of this was available in Grant's time. Pills containing opium, cocaine or wild concoctions were tried, and many people used alcohol to cover the symptoms (but only so long as the person drank).

My point is not to convince you that Grant was not a drinker. Maybe he drank a little and maybe he went on binges. Maybe if he drank, it was to hide the pain. Maybe he was not drinking, but simply suffering the symptoms of migraine attacks. Possibly even all of these could be true. I simply bring it to your attention to stimulate your thoughts.

Joe

Round Table Business

Joe called the meeting to order at 6:20 pm.

There were two guests in attendance this evening, Bill Crites and Bobby Hanson.

Joe noted that there are many changes to the Round Table, and he thanked everyone for their input.

Joe reported the by-laws are completed, and, with some minor corrections, will be posted on the website. As written, officers will serve a two-year term. We will vote on them next month. Also, we continue to progress with the 501-c-3 non-profit status.

Our new meeting schedule will start in April and end with the December meeting. Our 29th Campaign will start in April of 2026. For the purpose of filing taxes required for non-profit organizations, we will follow the fiscal year, January-December.

Election of Officers

These officers elected this evening will have their term ending December of 2026.

President: Joe Schaeffer

Secretary: Lisa Breneiser

Vice President: Clark Zimmerman

Treasurer: Chuck Bezler

The following will serve in supporting positions:

Preservation: Gary Hertzog

Technology: Craig Breneiser

Meal Captain: Vicky Heffner

Membership: Ev Binns

A motion to accept the nomination of officers was made by Wally Heimbach, seconded by Rodney LaPearl. All voted in favor.

Treasurers Report

Lori Border reported the balance as of March 11th was \$1,162.07, as well as \$94 in preservation. Lori thanked the roundtable for the opportunity to serve saying it was her pleasure to do so.

Membership

Our membership now stands at 57 members. We received a total of \$ 570.00 in donations in addition to membership fees in this campaign. Ev brought pens advertising our Round Table.

Preservation and Book Raffle

At our May meeting, the membership voted to donate \$125 to American Battlefield Trust for "Preserve 1099 Acres of Hallowed Ground." The Trust has saved over 58 million acres, and is approaching the 60-million-acre milestone.

The 1099 acres protect 3 different sites:

- 1006 acres at Chickasaw Bayou, Vicksburg Campaign, MS
- 84 acres at South Cavalry Battlefield, Gettysburg Campaign, PA
- 9 acres at Brandy Station Battlefield, VA, Gettysburg Campaign

\$4 million has already been raised by federal, state and private funds, and the Trust is seeking to raise \$162,500. The program has a \$26 to \$1 matching grant which raises our contribution to \$3,250!

The May Book Raffle took in \$116. Our Preservation Fund is currently at \$85.

Our Bonus Raffle concluded in May.

- 1st Prize- The Last Meeting Print (Lee & Jackson) -- Tim Antosy
- 2nd Prize-Lee's Lieutenant's (3 Volumes) -- Tim Antosy
- 3rd Prize- The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War -- John Hartner
- 4th Prize-6" Busts of Lee & Jackson -- Rodney LaPearl

Congratulations to the winners & thanks to everyone for your support!

28 th Season Preservation	Total for all Seasons
Total amount raised-\$810	
Total amount donated-\$1,125	Total amount donated - \$ 39,546
Total contribution with matching grants-\$41,244	Total contributed with Matching Grants - \$ 563,097

Website

Craig reported the website is having some issues with online reservations that he is working to troubleshoot and correct. The rest of the site is working properly, and he called everyone's attention to the series of postings appearing weekly about the presentations at the Central Virginia Battlefield Trust's spring conference and the Andrew Carnegie Free Library & Music Hall seminar.

June Program

A Wonderful Career in Crime: Charles Cowlam's Masquerades in the Civil War Era and Gilded Age

presented by Frank Garmon, Jr.

Charles Cowlam's career as a convict, spy, detective, congressional candidate, adventurer, and con artist spanned the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Gilded Age. His swindles touched many of the era's most prominent figures, including Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, and Ulysses S. Grant. Indeed, he would receive presidential pardons from both Lincoln and Davis! One contemporary newspaper reported that Cowlam "has as many aliases as there are letters in the alphabet." He was a chameleon in a world of strangers, and scholars have often overlooked him due to his elusive nature. His intrigues reveal how Americans built trust amid the transience and anonymity of the nineteenth century.



Frank W. Garmon Jr. studied history and economics at Christopher Newport University, before completing his M.A. and Ph.D. in history at the University of Virginia. His first book, *A Wonderful Career in Crime:*

Charles Cowlam's Masquerades in the Civil War Era and Gilded Age, was published by Louisiana State University Press in September. Garmon received the Provost's Award for Faculty Excellence

in Teaching Student Writing in 2023. At CNU, he regularly offers a course on American Entrepreneurship, and a senior seminar on Alexander Hamilton structured around the award-winning musical.



(Extended!) 28 th Campaign Programs		
Date	Speaker	Program
7/8/2025	Scott Mingus	<i>Targeted Tracks: The Cumberland Valley Railroad in the Civil War</i>
8/12/2025	Wally Heimbach	<i>Colonel Edward Cross and the Fighting 5th New Hampshire</i>
9/9/2025	Jason Elmeron	<i>Robert Todd Lincoln</i>
10/14/2025	Daminish Miller	<i>Five Women in the Civil War</i>
November 2025 *	Craig Symonds	<i>David Farragut & Chester Nimitz</i>
12/9/2025	Michael Harris	<i>The Philadelphia Campaign (Revolutionary War)</i>

* The date of Dr. Symonds' presentation will not be the usual day/time, and will be announced shortly.

Events / Tours/ and Other Happenings

Please feel free to share anything that you are aware of and would like added to the monthly newsletter. Please send them to my email me at Lisa.breneiser@gmail.com.

Summer is upon us and there are a variety of opportunities to take part in! Our Battlefields, Battlefield Trusts, and other historical outlets, including our local Berks History Center, have a variety of tours, seminars and events to fulfill your summer!

Dinner Reservations for the Tuesday, June 10, 2025
Meeting & Program: Deadline to order is June 6th, noon.

We had 38 members attend the May meeting. Kathy thanked everyone for their cooperation over the years. She appreciated everyone getting their meal orders in a timely fashion, happy to serve in this role and knows that Vicky will do a great job!

If possible, please make your meal choices/reservations on the website. When doing so, you should receive:

- An immediate “thank you” for making your reservation,
- A follow-up email that includes a copy of your meal selection, and
- A second email confirmation that everything has worked properly (this may be delayed by up to 24-hours).

If all of the above does not occur, please call Vicky Heffner to order your meal.

Our meal choices for June are:

Salad
Broiled Haddock
Chopped Sirloin
Lasagna

If you must call in reservations, please, call your menu selection to Vicky Heffner at 610.413.5543 no later than noon, June 6, 2025, which is also the deadline for online reservations. The price is \$32.00 inclusive for meals

IMPORTANT NOTE Once you have made your reservation, there are no cancellations for any reasons after noon on the FRIDAY preceding the meeting. This is the policy of Giannotti's, and the Round Table will be billed for your meal whether you attend or not. Please understand that you will be asked to reimburse the Round Table should you not attend after having made a reservation and not cancelled prior to the aforementioned time period.

****PLEASE NOTE: IT IS MUCH APPRECIATED IF YOU PAY IN THE APPROPRIATE DOLLAR AMOUNT. WE DO NOT HAVE A CHANGE DRAWER. WE WILL NOT ACCEPT \$50 OR \$100 BILLS IN PAYMENT.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.**

Checks may be made payable to “First Defenders Civil War Roundtable”.