

Banner

of the Blue and Gray

Newsletter of the Frederick County Civil War Roundtable
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193rd Meeting

March 2010

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Absolution at Gettysburg by Brad Scmehl

“Ego te absolvo”

Father Corby C.S.C. and the Irish Brigade

July 2, 1863, Gettysburg

As the second day of battle dawned on the already bloodied Gettysburg battlefield, the Union forces were under pressure from the Confederates on both flanks of their line. Union Commander Gen. George Meade called for reinforcements that included the Irish Brigade, composed predominantly of the 69th New York Militia. Two years into the War, the Brigade was severely depleted from casualties at Fredericksburg and Antietam, among other battles, from the original five regiments and 3,000 men to 600.

As the soldiers gathered before battle, their chaplain, Father William Corby of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, climbed on a boulder and, wearing his purple stole, raised his hand to give absolution to the men. Their flags lowered, the men knelt and, regardless of faith, all of the men including General Hancock, fell silent while Father Corby gave the blessing. Nearly 200 men of the Brigade were lost that day in the fierce fighting in the Wheat Field. Father Corby's absolution has been described by witnesses as the most moving moment of the War.

Born in Detroit in 1833, Father Corby studied for the priesthood at Notre Dame and, when war broke out, was assigned as Chaplain to the 88th NY of the Irish Brigade where he served for three years. Although Father Corby was best known for his actions

(Continued on Page 2, See **Father Corby**)



Happy St. Patrick's Day!

March Meeting

Thursday, March 18, 2010

7:30 PM

at the

**National Museum
of Civil War Medicine**

**48 East Patrick Street
Frederick, Maryland 21701**

Speaker: Michael Bunitsky

Subject: *The Kemp Hall Legislative Session — the special Maryland State Legislature session held in Frederick County at the beginning of the War.*

Our Speaker

Longtime Frederick educator and lecturer Michael Bunitsky was asked by the Evangelical Reformed United Church of Christ, where his wife is associate pastor, to research the role of Kemp Hall in the early days of the Civil War.

Built in 1860 as a commercial property at the corner of North Market and East Church Streets in the heart of downtown Frederick, Kemp Hall was just a year old when it entered the annals of history as the unexpected



Michael Bunitsky

chosen site of the special legislative session of the Maryland General Assembly in April 1861 which determined Maryland's role in the War.



On April 30, 1861 the weekly Frederick Herald reported: "The Legislature seems comfortable and well provided for in their new halls in the German Reformed Building." Today Kemp Hall is a multi-use facility managed by the Evangelical Reformed United Church of Christ.

Michael's presentation will explore the historic significance of the convening of the Maryland Legislature, Kemp Hall and Frederick.

Michael is currently in his 36th year as an educator, 31 years here in Frederick County. He taught for 15 years in the social studies department at Governor Thomas Johnson High School and has been the secondary social studies curriculum specialist for the last 16 years. He also serves as an adjunct faculty member at Frederick Community College. He has been a lecturer and adjunct faculty at Mount Saint Mary's College in Emmitsburg and an educational consultant on high school scheduling. Michael also has served on multiple Maryland State Department of Education curriculum writing and assessment writing committees. He obtained his undergraduate degree from the University of Maryland at College Park and his Master's degree from Hood College. Michael and his wife, the Rev. Janice Daffern, have four sons and currently reside in New Market.

Next Month's Speaker

Dean Herrin, National Park Service Historian and NPS Coordinator of the Catoctin Center for Regional Studies will explore the early events of the Civil War from John Brown's Raid to Fort Sumter at our next meeting, Thursday, April 15, 2010.

The Prez Sez



'Tis March again, and Happy St. Patrick's Day to you all! To celebrate the Civil War history of our Irish immigrants, you might want to read a novel by Cyril Francis Conway, *While the Banshee Cried*.

His novel follows the Irish Brigade's evolution from recruitment in 1861 to the Grand Review of the Army of the Potomac in 1865. I read this book some time ago, and Dottie met the author at a book signing in Harrisburg.

Dr. Conway dedicated his book "*To all those brave men who wore a sprig of boxwood in their caps and carried a shamrock in their hearts.*"

Donnie

Father Corby (continued from Page 1)

at Gettysburg, the "fighting Chaplain" as he was called also rode into fire at Antietam to comfort the wounded and bless the dying.

After the War, Father Corby returned to Notre Dame where he served two terms as President and became known as Notre Dame's "Second Founder" for his successful efforts in rebuilding the school after near destruction by a fire in April 1879.

Thirty years after that memorable day at Gettysburg, Father Colby published his own personal account of the War and the role of the Irish Brigade in his book, *Memoirs of Chaplain Life, Three Years with the Irish Brigade in the Army of the Potomac*.

When Father Corby died in 1897, his coffin was draped with the flag of his wartime regiment and his pall bearers were not members of his Holy Cross community but aging Civil War veterans who never forgot their chaplain's extraordinary grace under fire.

On October 29, 1910, nearly 50 years after the Battle of Gettysburg, a bronze statue of William Corby, C.S.C., was dedicated on the battlefield at Gettysburg, the only monument ever placed on that hallowed field to honor a chaplain or non-general. The memorial recognizes the moment when Father Corby, his

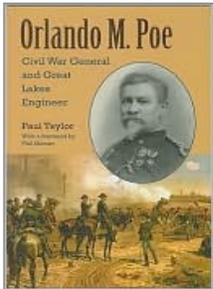


hand raised in blessing, gave general absolution to the soldiers of the Irish Brigade before they rushed into battle. A duplicate statue stands at the entrance to Corby Hall on the campus of Notre Dame University.

— Sources: www.en.wikipedia.org
www.praoh.org/history and www.amazon.com

The Bookshelf

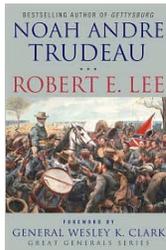
Orlando M. Poe: Civil War General and Great Lakes Engineer by Paul Taylor. Illustrated, index, bibliography, 16 maps, endnotes, 354 pp., 2009. Kent State University Press, Kent Ohio.



This outstanding, skillfully written narrative explores the life of an often overlooked Civil War general who was Sherman's chief engineer and at Sherman's side at Knoxville during the Atlanta campaign and during his fierce March to the Sea. The author chronicles Poe's life from growing up in rural Ohio to his West Point education, his remarkable engineering feats in the Great Lakes region both pre- and post-War, and his long, distinguished military career and close friendship with Sherman. Eight years following the War, Poe rejoined Sherman who was then commanding general of the U.S. Army to serve as engineer aide-de-camp from 1873 through 1883, when Sherman retired. This exceptional book is not only a superior character study, but also analyzes the military, political and social aspects of the period. Highly recommended.

Robert E. Lee by Noah Andre Trudeau. Part of the *Great Generals* series. Illustrated, maps, notes, index, 234 pp., 2009, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, NY.

This well-executed biography of Lee makes for an interesting and accurate introduction to the Southern general who remains a legendary figure in history. With absorbing detail and honest analysis, the author sheds light on the General, and leads the way to a deeper appreciation of one of our most celebrated leaders.



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

In June, your FCCWRT Board will meet to choose the nine speakers for our 2010-2011 season starting in September. The coming year will be the first of the Civil War Sesquicentennial continuing through 2015.

- Do you have a topic you would like to suggest?
- Have you heard a presentation about the Civil War that you think others would enjoy?
- What areas of Civil War history would you like to hear more about?

Send your suggestions to our P.O. Box 3232 or email Phil Dean, our vice president, at pd10X@comcast.net.

Let us hear from you!

Calendar of Events

March 13, Liberia Mansion Tours, Manassas, VA, 10AM and 1PM

Basement to Attic Tours of Liberia Mansion. Behind-the-scenes look at Civil War headquarters of Union and Confederate forces. \$15. Manassas Museum, 703-368-1873, manassasmuseum@ci.manassas.va.us.

March 14, Battlefield Hike, Antietam, MD 1:30PM

Antietam National Battlefield hike: The Irish Brigade at Antietam. Hike begins near the New York State Monument and will last approximately 2 hours. Information is subject to change. Before attending, call the park at 301-432-5124 or check www.nps.gov/anti.

March 20-21, Antique Arms Show, Timonium, MD, Sat. 9AM-5PM; Sun. 9AM-3PM

Original Baltimore Antique Arms Show, Maryland State Fairgrounds, Timonium. 1,000 tables. Sat., \$10, Sun. \$5. 301-865-6804, www.baltimoreshow.com.

March 27, Civil War Ball, Westminster, MD

3rd Annual Corbit's Charge Ball at the historic Westminster Armory. Music by Peg Chutes & Bruce Young. Victorian photography studio, door prizes. Period or formal attire requested. For information, tickets: 410-848-9161, www.westminstermd.gov.

March 27, Seminars, Gettysburg, PA, 8AM-4PM

Civil War Seminars at Harrisburg Area Community College Gettysburg Campus. Keynote speaker Patrick Falci "The Man in the Red Battle Shirt: The Life of General A.P. Hill." Choice of 6 classroom sessions; afternoon battlefield session. \$65 includes continental breakfast, buffet lunch. Registration deadline: March 19. For information: 717-338-1010.

April 10, Annual Park Clean Up Day, Monocacy National Battlefield, Frederick MD, 8:30AM

Volunteers will help preserve our national battlefield and environment by participating in the battlefield annual clean up sponsored by the Civil War Preservation Trust and the Monocacy National Battlefield. Ranger program at the conclusion of the event. To volunteer for Clean Up Day, contact Brett Spaulding, 301-662-3515, www.nps.gov/MONO.

April 10-11, Bell & History Days, Monocacy National Battlefield, Frederick MD, 8:30AM

Monocacy National Battlefield opens its spring season with special programs and activities, including a model train display, that focus on the vital role of the railroad during the Civil War. For information, contact Brett Spaulding, 301-662-3515, www.nps.gov/MONO.



FCCWRT Board Member Jeff Arey, above, mans our booth at the opening event of the Master Docent Workshop Weekend presented by the Frederick Historic Sites Consortium at Frederick Community College February 19-20. We have been successful in introducing the Roundtable to potential new members at events like this.

At our February meeting . . .

Living historian Hilda Koontz, as Sarah Anne Elizabeth Fleagle, gave a moving first-person account of what life was like for the Fleagle family of Westminster, Md., both at home and on the front lines during the War.

Based on a collection of more than 60 letters from members of the Fleagle family, Hilda's program brought home the personal cost of the War.

Four of Sarah's beloved brothers went off to War and only two returned. Her brother Amos was wounded and presumed dead in early 1863 in Tennessee and her other brother, Uriah, who enlisted in the 1st Maryland Potomac Home Brigade at age 18, was killed at Culp's Hill at Gettysburg on the 3rd day of battle. As Sarah Fleagle noted, he was only 20 miles from home.

The program concluded with the sobering thought that the Fleagle family's sacrifice was but one story of one small family. There were thousands of families across the land who were touched by the tragedy of the War — and who may have wondered, with Sarah, if they would some day look back and say it was all worth it.



MISSION

TO cultivate and preserve Frederick County's Civil War heritage and broaden the understanding of the Civil War Era and its impact on our nation.

TO explore the many facets of the Civil War from the battlefield to first-person narratives, including guest lectures by writers and historians.

TO support historical projects and activities aimed at increasing public interest and appreciation of our Civil War history, both locally and nationally.

2009-2010 Board of Directors

Donnie Toms , President	301-668-8660
ddtoms@comcast.net	
Phillip Dean , Vice President	301-865-8202
pd10X@comcast.net	
Jim Enright , Secretary	Cell: 301-514-3741
jpenright@potomacadvisors.com	
Bob Kozak , Treasurer	301-644-1396
KZAKR@aol.com	
Jack Sheriff , Archivist	301-371-4148
jbsheriff1@comcast.net	
Jack Brennan , Webmaster	301-829-4415
jackAC3@comcast.net	
Dottie Toms , Director	301-668-8660
ddtoms@comcast.net	
Jeff Arey , Director	301-874-2609
jeff.arey@comcast.net	

Communications, dues, questions or comments for the Roundtable should be directed to:

FCCWRT
P.O. Box 3232
Frederick MD 21705-3232
www.frederickcountycivilwarrrt.org

Ramblings from the Raffle Table

Friends, our special raffle winner for last month was Kathi Donatucci. Our next special raffle will be a fabulous brand new item sent to us for our raffle by CWPT — a set of four audio CDs and cover book, *The American Civil War*, by Professor Gary W. Gallagher, University of Virginia. Tickets for this item are \$3. The drawing will be held in April, giving you a second chance to buy a ticket.

Again this month our 3/\$1 raffle items have been donated from the library of David Reid. We must make a correction as to Mr. Reid's tenure as FCCWRT President, which was 1991-92, not 1995 as previously stated.

Come and see our selection — and the Luck O' the Irish to You!