

Sumter to Appomattox

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

No. 13, January 2004

A Message from the Chairman –

May I take this opportunity to welcome our members to our 2004 program of Civil War activities and trust that you all had a restful break over the Christmas/New Year holidays. As you will have seen from the Supplement to this Newsletter, this year's program is an exciting one and builds on our successes of previous years. Our meeting night has been changed for this year and is to be the third Wednesday of each second month.

The early printing of our last Newsletter prevented me from congratulating Esther Brazil for her selection for the World Rugby Cup Choir and her performances of the *'Star Spangled Banner'* at each of the pool games the United States team played. Anybody who heard her singing will agree that her performances were absolutely magnificent! Speaking of Esther, she has just been awarded a Choral Scholarship to Oxford University for 2005. We would wish to extend to this talented young woman our heartiest congratulations for these outstanding achievements.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank again publicly Elaine and Roger Dixon for extending the invitation to us to use again their property at Pokolbin for our most successful Christmas function. What was really good about the day was the opportunity to meet and socialise with members' partners and friends who generally do not share our passion for matters Civil War. I would like to thank, also, those people who made donations including prizes for our giant raffle that helped defray costs for the function and, in particular, to Philippa Cook, John's daughter, for her most generous provision of the wide range of toiletries etc that went to make up the gift baskets for the day. Also, Jennifer Kirkby's father continues as our major sponsor with his donation of a \$50 book voucher again. Thank you. These gestures were appreciated greatly, particularly by those who won the prizes!

It would be remiss of me if I didn't make special mention of the paper that served as the basis for David Smith's presentation at our last meeting in December. The scholarship displayed in this paper is truly outstanding and Father Dave should be complimented for his efforts in putting together something that will serve us as a record of these critical issues of religious

beliefs and their impact on American society during the Civil War. Well done, Father Dave and thank you!

Our first meeting for year is to be a rather special one with our proposed conferring of Honorary Membership to the Chapter on Len Traynor for his contribution to Civil War research in Australia. This is only the second such membership granted since our inception and will involve Len being the speaker for this meeting. Please make every effort to attend this meeting as you will be assured of a most stimulating presentation!

Paul Kensey

Next Month's Meeting

Our first scheduled meeting for this year is to be held at our normal venue, the **Roseville Memorial RSL Club, Pacific Highway, Roseville**, on the evening of **Wednesday, February 18, 2004** with the meeting's proceedings to commence at **7pm**.

As usual, members will be able to meet at the Club from 6pm for a bistro style meal.

The presentation planned for this meeting is something really special with **Len Traynor** speaking on the topic:

“General Officers of the Union and Confederate Armies”

Members who have participated in one or both of our July Conferences will have seen Len perform without notes and keep his audiences enthralled throughout the total presentation. You may be assured of a most interesting, informative and thought provoking presentation on the human side of the conflict that members might have great difficulty in exploring expeditiously through the normal Civil War references and sources.

It is proposed that a question and answer/comment session will follow Len's presentation and a copy of his paper will be included with the "mail-out" of next Newsletter to our members.

Civil War Happenings – A Change

In previous issues of this Newsletter a section was devoted to Civil War happenings in the month of that the Newsletter was circulated.

Rather than repeat these happenings in subsequent editions of the Newsletter, it is proposed to detail the happenings in the following month. Any member who has mislaid last year's Newsletter for a particular month and would want that month's happenings, should contact John Cook for a copy of the earlier publication.

It Happened in February

HATCHES AND DESPATCHES

February 3, 1807 – Joseph E Johnston (CSA) is born at "Cherry Grove", Prince Edward County, Virginia;

February 6, 1833 – JEB Stuart (CSA) is born in Patrick County, Virginia;

February 8, 1820 – William Tecumseh Sherman (USA) is born in Lancaster, Ohio;

February 11, 1812 – Alexander Hamilton Stephens, Vice President of the Confederacy is born in Wilkes (Taliaferro) County, Georgia;

February 12, 1809 – Abraham Lincoln, 16th US President is born in Hardin County, Kentucky.

COMMAND AND POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS

February 9, 1861 – Jefferson Davis is elected as provisional President of the Confederacy by the Confederate Provisional Congress;

February 9, 1865 – Lee appointed General-in-Chief of Confederate Armies;

February 18, 1861 – Davis is inaugurated as President of the Confederacy;

February 22, 1862 – Davis is sworn in as President of the Confederacy in Richmond, Virginia.

BATTLES / MILITARY ACTIONS

February 5, 1864 – Sherman's Federals march into Jackson Mississippi en route to Meridian;

February 10, 1862 – The remainder of the "Mosquito" fleet is destroyed at Elizabeth City, NC;

BATTLES / MILITARY ACTIONS cont'd

February 14, 1864 – Sherman's Union troops capture Meridian, Mississippi;

February 16, 1862 – Confederates surrender Fort Donelson, Tennessee, to Ulysses S Grant

February 17, 1865 – Columbia, SC, is captured and Charleston, SC, is evacuated;

February 18, 1865 – Charleston, SC, surrenders to Union troops under Brigadier General Alexander Schimmelfennig;

February 24, 1862 – Federal troops under General Nathaniel Banks occupy Harpers Ferry, Virginia;

OTHER SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

February 1, 1865 – Illinois is the first State to ratify the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery;

February 4, 1861 – First session of the Provisional Congress of the Confederate States of America is held in Montgomery, Alabama;

February 7, 1865 - Lincoln meets with the Confederate peace commissioners aboard the *River Queen* at Hampton Roads, Virginia;

February 19, 1862 - New Confederate Congress orders the release of 2,000 Federal POWs;

February 20, 1865 – The Confederate House of Representatives authorises use of slaves as soldiers;

February 23, 1861 – Texas voters approve secession by a wide margin;

February 25, 1862 – Federal War Department takes control of all telegraph lines to facilitate military movements;

February 26, 1863 – The Cherokee Indian National Council repeals the ordinance of secession, proclaims for the Union;

February 27, 1864 – Near Americus in Georgia, Federal Prisoners of War begin arriving at the unfinished Camp Sumter (Andersonville) prison camp.

Famous Last Words

"Mosby has annoyed me considerably"

- General Philip Sheridan,
Army of the Shenandoah

"Hurrah for Mosby"

- General Robert E Lee

Religion in Antebellum America

These two articles comprise a number that have been prepared to complement the paper by David Smith that was the basis of his presentation to our members at our last meeting in December. The final article in this series will appear in the next Newsletter.

Religion was an important aspect of life in Antebellum America and was to play a critical role in the social reform and cultural change of the period. America was overwhelmingly Protestant during the antebellum period with its major denominations and their numerous sectional offshoots. During this time, however, membership of the Catholic Church increased significantly due, at least in part, to Irish and German immigration and by the Civil War was one of the largest Christian denominations in the country.

There was a rich diversity of religious practices throughout the country with New England's Puritan heritage and its Calvinist principles evident in the Congregational and Unitarian churches, whilst the Dutch Reformed Church had a strong influence in both New York and New Jersey. The Episcopalian Church, part of the Anglican Communion, had a strong presence amongst the upper classes in New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and South Carolina. The Lutherans had spread to the South from New York, New Jersey and Delaware and by the early 19th Century were settling in the Midwest. The Baptist and the Methodist Churches with their evangelical traditions were located throughout the country and were particularly strong in the South where, by 1860, 80% of churchgoers belonged to one or other of these denominations.

For both the free blacks and slaves, maintaining their traditional religious practices from Africa was particularly difficult. The break-up of family and tribal groups militated against any continuance of their former practices and the influence of evangelical Christianity essentially redefined their form of worship. Over time, African Americans merged their former beliefs and folklore with the established Christian religion to form a distinctive African American tradition. Many both free and slave, found comfort in the Christian beliefs of salvation and an after-life in "paradise" through Christ. Moses and exodus themes were also popular black religious teachings

Observance of Sunday as the Sabbath was strictly observed by all of the Christian churches and rigorously enforced by law and community pressure. There were significant differences, however, in the approaches to religion in the North and the South, differences that would ultimately result in a schism within the various denominations over the institution of slavery. In the North, "Yankee Protestantism", emphasised both the need for social reform and an inherent sound relationship between the use of one's labour and the creation of personal wealth.

Furthermore, reform movements flourished in the North with the Temperance, Women's Rights and Public Education movements each receiving widespread support. With its roots in the "free labour" concept, Abolitionism was to become the most important reform movement of the antebellum period and provided the major catalyst for the sectional breakdown that would lead ultimately to war.

Southern religion differed in a number of ways from that prevailing in the North. As a consequence of its strong evangelical tradition, Southern religion was more personal emphasising personal salvation and was much less interested in societal reform. The temperance and education reform movements did not thrive in the South and the abolitionist cause was to be the *cause célèbre* for the sectional breakdown that was to lead ultimately to war. Thus, in 1837 the Presbyterian Church divided into two groups - the New School Churches, mostly in the North, who considered slavery as a sin and the Old School Churches in the South who declared it was not. This was followed in the 1840s, by the split of the Methodist and Baptist denominations and the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the Southern Baptist Church separate from the established Northern branches of these denominations. These newly established Southern branches either supported or were not prepared to condemn the institution of slavery whilst the Northern branches were generally aligned to the abolitionist cause. Essentially, this schism of these churches arose from the different views of churches' responsibility to society. In the North, reform, morality and decency were considered to be part of this responsibility, whilst in the South, the church were generally considered as "... a spiritual body whose purposes are only the dispensation of eternal salvation".

In recent times, some historians have presented an alternative view of the sectional differences over slavery. These historians argue that both the abolitionists in the North and the Southern apologists believed they lived in a society in which their material wealth was evidence of God's favour. Thus, any attempt to change or interfere with the societal institutions was a challenge to God's Providence. The North perceived *slavery* as an artificial system that interfered with the workings of a successful free economy whilst to Southerners *abolitionism* was the same!

It was not only the established churches that suffered sectional breakdown around this time. The second national political party system broke down with the Whig Party dying out in 1852, the Democratic Party becoming a Southern dominated party and, in 1856, the Republican Party was founded as a sectional (Northern) party. In 1857, the Supreme Court, thought to be above sectional politics delivered its infamous *Dred Scott* decision that was to alienate a large part of the North by seemingly to guarantee the spread of slavery throughout the country.

Thus, all of the major institutions that might be expected to provide a measure of political and social stability for the fledging nation were failing or had failed and with the result of the election in 1860 set the seal for the secession crisis and the terrible conflict to come.

Religion During the War

When war came, both Northerners and Southerners looked to God to help them in their cause and defeat the enemy. Sermons in both the North and the South highlighted the righteousness of their respective causes and prayers were offered to the Almighty exhorting Him to favour their cause. Interestingly, in the Confederacy the white preachers gave sermons to segregated congregations of blacks and whites that reinforced the system of slavery and the values associated with being submissive to one's masters with acceptable bible texts such as:

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear"

*"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's
and unto God the things that are God's"*

Unacceptable texts for these sermons included:

"You will know the truth and the truth shall make you free"

In the Southern churches with their evangelical tradition, it would be interesting to see how the clergy rationalised their position in categorising some biblical texts as "unacceptable" for their congregations.

Despite the firm belief on both sides of the conflict that God looked with favour on their respective causes, there was concern that those involved in the War would lapse into "...moral degeneration and religious apathy". Soldiers, particularly those from rural areas away from home for the first time, would be subject to "the evils of drink and wanton pleasures". To address this some 600 clergymen were appointed by the Confederates and 2300 by the Federals as chaplains to the troops in the field. Of the 2,300 Federal chaplains, however, no more than 600 were on active duty with Federal units at any time throughout the War.

These chaplains' duties involved the conduct of religious services including presiding over prayer meetings of troops particularly prior to battle. They helped, also, with the wounded, both at the frontline and in the rear echelons of the battlefield, provided comfort for the dying and wrote letters for the wounded and to the families of those killed in battle or who died through illness. They managed camp libraries of religious and secular publications, counselled the troubled and faint-hearted and served as unit postmasters. In the Union Armies, the Chaplain took on the role of teacher to the illiterate soldiers, both black and white, and to civilians attached to their unit.

Of particular significance was the role that chaplains on both sides of the conflict played in being responsible for inspiring and guiding the troops in the Christian revivals that swept through the respective armies in throughout the War and particularly in 1863 and 1864. These revivals tended to coincide with critical times in the War when major victories/defeats had occurred that reinforced the perception of God's support for one side or indicated the need for more religious fervour to address apparent falls from grace.

Although chaplains had served with the American forces since the Revolution in the previous century, the Civil War brought with it controversy and debate about their status and role. In the North, this debate focused mainly on the extent of the conflict and the need for a vastly increased allocation of chaplains than the level already approved by Congress, which was a mere 30 chaplains for the 19 regiments and 128 companies of the 16,000 "Old Army". Nevertheless, it was the prospect of incorporating a large number of clergy into the armed forces raised that legislators on both sides of the conflict found troubling. The Union endorsed an increased number of chaplains first with its *General Orders Nos. 15 and 16, of May 4 1861*, which directed regimental commanding officers to appoint a chaplain. These appointments were then confirmed by regimental elections.

Chaplains were declared 'non-combatants' by the US War Department in 1863 and, as such, were to be released immediately on capture in battle. Many were treated as ordinary POWs, however, and when taken prisoner performed their duties in the prison camp to which they were sent. Both sides had chaplains who displayed remarkable courage under fire when they accompanied their regiments into battle where they were able to save the lives of troops wounded in the fighting. Three such Union chaplains were awarded the Medal of Honor.

The concern for the spiritual welfare of the troops was addressed, also, by the provision of religious reading materials to them. The extent of this form of support may be judged by the distribution by the U.S. Christian Commission of "...about 1.5 million Bibles, a million hymnals and 39 million tracts to Northern troops, and organised 300 portable libraries to circulate 30,000 volumes of uplifting reading matter". A similar but smaller scale effort was initiated for Southern troops by the Confederate Bible Society and the South Carolina Tract Society.

Religion figured largely in the lives of both Federal and Confederate troops throughout the War although the nature of religious observance differed on the two sides as a consequence of their respective religious traditions prior to the War. Furthermore, religious practice and observance tended to become more flexible with time and exposure to camp life and battle.

(This series is to be concluded in the next Newsletter)