



SOUTH BAY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

South Bay Civil War Roundtable Meeting Minutes February 28, 2025

Meeting Location: Jack's Restaurant & Bar 1502 Saratoga Ave, San Jose, CA 95129 located in the Westgate Center Shopping Mall and via ZOOM

Special Activities & Events:

2nd Annual Central Coast Conference

- Event Theme: Seldom Heard History of the Civil War
- Location: Stanton Center, Monterey, California
- Date: May 2-4, 2025
- Event URL: <https://whtours.org/seldom-heard-history-2025.html>

Officer Reports

President

No Report

Vice President

No Report

Treasurer

- SBCWRT Wells Fargo checking account as of 1-31-25: \$\$2,441.48; an increase of \$125.00 from the previous month

Secretary

- Civil War Quiz: What Do You Know Bleeding Kansas?
- Meeting Attendance: Total: 9 (7 in-person; 2 via ZOOM)

This Month in Civil War History: February

1861: The southern states that had seceded assemble delegates at Montgomery, Alabama to organize the Confederate States of America. The delegates are tasked with drafting a Confederate Constitution and establishing a provisional government.

1862: Battle of Roanoke Island, North Carolina. A Confederate defeat, the battle resulted in US occupation of eastern North Carolina and control of Pamlico Sound, to be used as Northern base for further operations against the southern coast.

1863: The most significant American Civil War event in February 1863 was the Battle of Dover (also known as the Second Battle of Fort Donelson), which took place on February 3rd in Stewart County, Tennessee

1864: In Georgia, Camp Sumter Prison Camp opens. Universally referred to as Andersonville Prison Camp, it will become notorious for overcrowded conditions and a high death rate among its inmates

1865: Sherman's Army captures Columbia, South Carolina while Confederate defenders evacuate Charleston, South Carolina

Person of the Month: George A. Trenholm - Profiting from the Confederacy

Early Life

- Born Feb. 25, 1807, Charleston, South Carolina
- At 16, George Trenholm had begun working for a major cotton broker, John Fraser and Company in Charleston; Rises to partner
- By 1853 he led the company, Fraser and Trenholm & Co.
- By 1860, one of the wealthiest men in the south
- Financial investments included steamships, hotels, wharves, cotton and plantations
- Was director of the Bank of Charleston and a South Carolina railroad
- Democrat in South Carolina legislature
- In 1860, strong supporter of secession Civil War
- **Civil War**

1861

- Liverpool based in England
- Served as financial agents for the Confederate government
- Owned more than 25 blockade runners during the war
- Estimated that by March 1863 had made \$9 million (equivalent to \$90 million in 2023) by blockade running

Blockade Running

- Union blockade designed to disrupt Confederacy's foreign trade
- Larger ships loaded with military items, luxury items, etc. from England would steam across the Atlantic to the neutral ports of Nassau, Bahamas; Havana, Cuba; and St. George, Bermuda
- In port, the cargoes transferred to smaller blockade runners; returned with bales of cotton and other goods such as tobacco and turpentine

Profits

- The lifespan of a blockade runner was measured in successful trips, and four was the average number before capture
- Steamers reached profitability after just two trips, four trips/good profit
- Two round trips per month could incur \$80,000 in expenses and generate \$250,000 in revenue. Cotton valued at \$15,000 in Georgia could sell for \$150,000 in England
- Investors lined up to sink money into blockade-running companies that sprang up and shipping firms that branched out into blockade running
- The business would prove to be highly successful, not just for Southern enterprises, but for English ones as well

George A. Trenholm - Civil War

- Appointed to South Carolina's State Marine Battery Commission, where he oversaw the construction of the Confederate ironclad Chicora
- Trenholm personally financed construction of a twelve-vessel flotilla for Charleston's defense
- Unofficial adviser to Confederate Treasury Secretary Christopher Memminger for four years
- Succeeded Memminger in July 1864
- Could do little to stop the financial havoc as the rebel government grew insolvent and printing money caused inflation
- Continued lavish entertaining for the elite of Richmond
- Fled Richmond with the cabinet April 5, 1865
- Resigned as Treasury Secretary April 27, 1865

Arrest and Pardon

- Arrested June 13, 1865, accused of stealing millions in Confederate assets
- Paroled on June 25 but arrested again on July 12
- Secretary of War Edwin Stanton suspected him of involvement in President Lincoln's assassination
- Pardoned by President Andrew Johnson/released on October 11, 1865

Return to Business and Politics

- Some properties confiscated by the U.S. government based on the failure of the Trenholm firm to pay customs duties on the many items imported by blockade runners during the war
- Trenholm's cotton brokerage firm bankrupt in 1867, but it successfully shifted to take advantage of the state's postwar phosphate mining boom
- Became known for philanthropy to blacks and whites in the South Carolina Low County
- Wrote In 1865 emancipation of blacks necessary/argued for their uplift
- Voters elected Trenholm to the South Carolina legislature in 1874, and he died in office
- Popular legend suggests that Trenholm and his exploits inspired Margaret Mitchell's character of Rhett Butler in Gone with the Wind

Historian

No Report

Other Topics

Show & Tell Program

- Getting people to make major presentations is a challenge because it takes much research and preparation.
- Show & Tell requires little preparation because the presenter is just providing the highlights on the topic, and not an in-depth dissertation
- Select a month during the year for Show & Tell; seek volunteers for presentations
- Concerns: Without effective guidelines, the risk of overly long and non-informative presentations is a concern
- Decision: Regular presentations are scheduled through June 2025; if later months in 2025 re left unscheduled, Show & Tell will be revisited

Resumption Of Annual SBCWRT Picnic

- Tonya McQuade offered to Host a SBCWRT picnic event at her home
- The event would be something like a Pot Luck were all who are attending would bring something food items to share
- **Previous SBCWRT Picnic Events**
 - Initially held in August – moved to September to avoid heat
 - Held at members house who volunteered
 - Members and one guest could attend
 - Cost: Ranged from \$15 to \$20 per person; funds used to purchase main meal food items and refreshments
 - Members encouraged to bring other items as Pot Luck: appetizers, pastries, deserts, chips & dip, etc.

- Discontinued with COVID-19 Pandemic – not resumed

February Presentation

Speaker: Tom Roza

Topic: “John Buford - A Forerunner of Mechanized Warfare Tactics.”

March Presentation

Speaker: Tonya McQuade

Topic: “Paddy's Lament and the Irish Brigade”

April Presentation

Speaker: Alan Sissenwein

Topic: “William B. Franklin, One of the Union’s Worst Generals”