THE CHARGER

THE CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

November 2026 CCWRT Founded 1956 Vol. 51, No. 4

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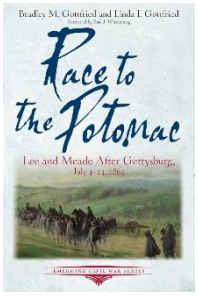
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MEETING – November 11, 2026

PROGRAM – "After Gettysburg: Race to the Potomac – Meade's Pursuit and Lee's Retreat"



SPEAKER—Dr. Brad Gottfried and Linda Gottfried. Dr. Gottfried spent forty years as a college educator, rising to the presidency of two colleges before his retirement in 2017. He has written 23 books on the Civil War and is a Gettysburg Licensed Town Guide as well as an Antietam Licensed Battlefield Guide. Linda Gottfried, BFA, is married to Dr. Gottfied and, in addition to her own achievements as a graphic designer and development officer at several colleges, has collaborated on several projects with her husband, including *Race to the Potomac: Meade and Lee After Gettysburg, July 4-14*, published by the Emerging Civil War.

LOCATION: The Holiday Inn Independence at 6001 Rockside Road, Independence, Ohio 44131, off US Interstate 77

TIME: Social Hour at 6:00 PM and Presentation at 7:30 PM

For reservations email: ccwrtreserve@gmail.com. To ensure dinner is reserved for you, the reservation must be made by Tuesday, November 3, 2026.

Website:
http://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com

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CCWRT Dispatches



CWRT debaters sought for Jan. 13!

The Annual CWRT Dick Crews Memorial Debate will be on January 13, 2027. Our topic this time will be, "Who Was the Worst General of the Civil War?"

The topic is an "oldie but a goodie" from the past. Roundtable President John Syroney, who chose the topic this time (a prerogative of the office), participated in the 2001 debate. The topic that time, which I chose as President, was a little different, that is to say, "The Absolutely Worst General of the Civil War." The question of who was the worst general of the war remains one of history's most contentious topics, with plenty of potential claimants to the title.

Each of our five debaters will speak for five minutes, making his or her case to those in attendance, and then take questions for five minutes. They will then participate in a general discussion/rebuttal session ("the scrum"). Those present will then vote as to which debater made the most compelling case. The winner will, or course, receive fabulous prizes.

I will say again, as I've said in years past, that *all* are welcome – and encouraged – to participate as debaters, regardless of sex, age, historical expertise or length of Roundtable membership. We don't expect *anyone* to be an absolute expert on the Civil War, and diversity among our debaters is certainly something I always strive for. If you've been a debater in the past five years, however, I suggest you sit this one out, to give new members, and those who have not yet debated, an opportunity.

Please email me ASAP at WFBVodrey at aol dot com if you'd like to be a debater. First come, first served as to choice of generals. Thanks!

William Vodrey
CWRT Recruiter and Moderator

CWRT CIVIL WAR PRINT RAFFLE

This year we are offering Raffle Tickets for a Civil War Print created by famed artist, Keith Rocco. The name of the print is "The Coaling" and depicts the scene at the Battle of Port Republic. Tickets will be offered to any members, friends, family, or acquaintances for the price of $10 per ticket. Members and friends can start purchasing tickets during the October Meeting and at every meeting afterwards. Members can also send in tickets through the mail as well. Information regarding this will be coming shortly. There is no limit to the number of tickets purchased and the winner will be announced at the May 2027 meeting.

CCWRT HEADGEAR FOR SALE

Back by popular demand is the next generation of CCWRT hats! We have ordered a limited number of these new hats and will make them available at our September 9th meeting. Priced at $30.00 each they'll make a great addition to your Roundtable swag. If interested, please provide cash or check payable to the CCWRT. Depending on demand, we can also order additional hats.



Loss of an Esteemed Member of the Roundtable

The Cleveland Civil War Roundtable mourns the loss of longtime member Kirk Stewart, who passed away on October 26th. Kirk was a valued member of our Roundtable, a true gentleman, a fine historian, and a gracious

man willing to share his expertise patiently with all who asked. He had a vast knowledge of weapons and had an extensive collection of historical weapons, which he took great joy in displaying at Roundtable meetings and discussing with Roundtable members. Kirk was also a sailor, jokester, historian, card player, meticulous woodworker, maple syrup aficionado, crabman, fisherman, forager, amazing dad, brother, cousin, and friend to many. Kirk will be deeply missed.



Brian Kowell Featured in Emerging Civil War's October 2026 Newsletter

Cleveland Civil War Roundtable member Brian Kowell, who is also a contributor to Emerging Civil War (ECW), is featured in ECW's October 2026 newsletter. Brian is the subject of the newsletter's monthly article which asks questions to an ECW contributor regarding that person's Civil War interests.

Among the questions Brian was asked is the usual question about how that ECW contributor became interested in the Civil War. Brian indicated that his Civil War interest began in 1961 when, at age 10, he experienced the Civil War Centennial, which included reading daily articles in the newspaper that related what happened on that day during the war. Brian also noted that he received the book *The American Heritage Picture History of the Civil War* by Bruce Catton and was taken by the "great pictures and those cool figurine maps of battles." Brian added that he collected a complete set of the Civil War trading cards which were sold around that time in order to coincide with the Civil War Centennial.

In reply to another question, Brian said that Judson Kilpatrick is the Civil War person with whom he would most like to have dinner. Brian's reason for choosing Kilpatrick is so he could ask the cavalry commander about the orders to kill Jefferson Davis that were found on the body of Kilpatrick's slain subordinate, Ulric Dahlgren. Brian wants to know who gave those orders. Brian was also asked to name his favorite unsung hero of the Civil War, and he replied that it is William Hoel, who was, in Brian's estimation, the most famous pilot of the Civil War. When asked for his bucket list Civil War site that he has never visited, Brian replied that he has two: the Pea Ridge and Wilson's Creek battlefields.





Brian was also asked what Civil War horse is his favorite. He gave his answer, but rather than risk stealing Brian's thunder by repeating it here, he can tell us at the December 2026 Roundtable meeting when Brian will be the speaker, and his presentation will be "Civil War Horses." Roundtable members can attend the December 2026 meeting and not only learn what Civil War horse is Brian's favorite but also hear a presentation by the Roundtable's very own Emerging Civil War celebrity, Brian Kowell.

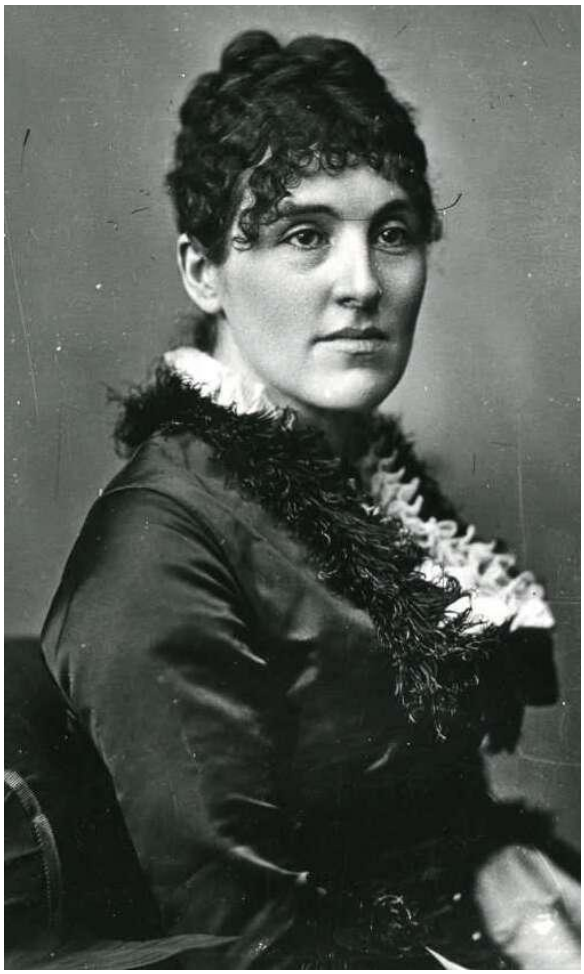
The Editor's Desk



WHY DID THEY FIGHT?—is a question that has haunted generations of Civil War scholars and students. There were of course many reasons, not all rational. As Jeff Daniels stated while portraying Colonel Joshua Chamberlain in the "Gettysburg Movie," "Some came because they were bored at home and thought this might be fun." Of course many fought, as James McPherson has stated, "for the cause and comrades." Sometimes, however, the motivation for soldiers fighting in a Civil War skirmish could be quite mundane. Decades ago, the actor Lloyd Bridges had a TV series (no, not "Sea Hunt"—that is another discussion). The show I'm thinking about, titled "The Lloyd Bridges Show," was an anthology series that lasted about one season in which Bridges played a journalist who pursued a different story each week. The hook was that during each episode, Bridges' character would be involved in a flashback telling of the story in which Bridges also played the main character. In one episode that aired in 1962, the journalist played by Bridges visits a Civil War museum and is transported into a story about a pair of boots. Bridges portrays a Confederate sergeant leading a detail of men between the lines during a truce to gather the wounded and hastily bury the dead. Union soldiers are also moving outside the lines for the same purpose. At some point the two sides meet. One of the Confederates, wearing a pair of dilapidated shows with the soles almost completely gone eyes a Yankee sporting what looks to be a new pair of boots. Bridges warns the man not to start trouble, but, of course, it happens, and the Confederate murders the Yankee for his boots. This sets off desperate fighting between the two detachments, ending the truce and resulting in much senseless bloodshed. When Bridges finally gets the survivors back to the Confederate lines, it is discovered that both boots have huge holes in their soles, demonstrating the futility of the whole affray. Flash back to the present in the museum, Bridges is studying the boots on display when a young boy asks him what the soldiers were fighting about. He answers that there were many reasons, but sometimes it might just have been for a pair of boots. The episode ends when Bridges lifts one boot and observes a hole in its sole. He leaves the other boot without looking and walks away.

Many of us have read or heard the myth about Gettysburg starting when Henry Heath decided to move towards the town on July 1, 1863, looking for shoes. True or not, I was recently reminded about all of this when I started reading Eric Wittenberg's book about the establishment of West Virginia, *Seceding from Secession: The Civil War, Politics, and the Creation of West Virginia* (Savas Beatie, 2020). When West Virginia became a state in June 1863, there was a need to create a state supreme court. The local county circuit courts could handle matters at that level, but appellate courts, among other necessities, require access to a well-stocked law library. It seemed that the Virginia State Supreme Court had provided that a law library be established in Lewisburg, the county seat of Greenbrier County, near White Sulphur Springs. The new state and Federal military authorities were convinced that the law library rightfully belonged to the people of West Virginia since the facility had been placed in Lewisburg for use by the appellate courts hearing cases from northwestern Virginia. Brigadier General Benjamin Franklin Kelley, commander of the West Virginia military department, accordingly, directed William Averell to take his brigade of 1300 cavalry and mounted infantry to Lewisburg to secure the law books, legal documents, and other materials for use by the government of the new state. Colonel George S. Patton (grandfather of the WW II general) met Averill with a force of 1900 Confederates near White Sulphur Springs on August 26-27, 1863. During the two-day fight, Averill lost 218 casualties, including 26 killed and 67 captured. Confederate casualties amounted to 167, with 20 killed and 18 missing. Averill was forced to retreat, and the Confederates seized the law books, shipping them to Richmond. The small victory gave a slight morale boost to the South after the recent defeat at Gettysburg. For those men killed and their families, the skirmish may as well as been Gettysburg, the grief and suffering being the same for all. West Virginia's Supreme Court had to obtain a law library elsewhere. In the meantime, the sharp little engagement near White Sulphur Springs would always be remembered as the Battle of the Law Books.





George Pickett and his ever-devoted wife, Sallie Corbell Pickett

Pickett's Charged, Part II

By David Carrino

[EDITOR'S NOTE: *Here we continue Dave Carrino's excellent article about George Pickett's execution of North Carolina "deserters." Part I can be found in last month's Charger*]

Pickett's potential prosecution: Pickett on the lam and Grant's intercession

At some point, Pickett returned to the Army of Northern Virginia and remained with that army essentially until its surrender. During the period of over one year between Pickett's return from North Carolina and the end of the war, while the war was grinding toward its conclusion, the Kinston executions receded into the past, where Pickett likely expected them to remain. But following the end of the war, those executions came back to haunt Pickett as terrifyingly as if the specters of the men who were hanged had emerged from the afterlife to torment Pickett.

Not long after the end of the Civil War, an investigation into the hangings was initiated. The impetus for this came from W.H. Doherty, a Union officer who was the assistant quartermaster in New Bern at the time of the hangings. It is not known why Doherty had such an interest in this matter, other than perhaps a personal desire to see justice, but in September 1865 Doherty sent letters to army superiors and to government officials requesting that the issue of the Confederate officers responsible for the hangings be addressed. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton then instructed Thomas Ruger, the commander of the Department of North Carolina, to appoint a board of inquiry, and Doherty was placed in charge of the three-member board. From late October to mid-November of 1865, the board held hearings in New Bern and Kinston. Among the 28 witnesses who testified were widows of some of the men who were hanged and also local citizens who were present at the hangings.

The testimonies of the witnesses made clear that the prisoners were mistreated after their capture. For example, the prisoners were confined in a very sparse cell, which was referred to by one of the witnesses as "the dungeon of the old jail." In addition, they were forced to subsist on one cracker a day and were saved from starvation only because family members and friends brought food to them. Prior to their confinement, the prisoners had been denied counsel and witnesses at their courts-martial, which were designed to produce guilty verdicts. The board of inquiry's witnesses also related that the bodies of the hanged men were violated after the men were executed. The bodies were cut down and then, while they were lying on the ground in full view of the people present at the hangings, the bodies were stripped of their Union uniforms "almost or quite to a state of nudity." Moreover, the bodies were left on the ground in that state until they were claimed by family members, who were responsible for removing the bodies on their own.

One piece of evidence, which speaks to a legal technicality, indicated that most of the men who were hanged never actually served in the Confederate States' army. Other than Haskett and Jones, who were the first two men executed, the other 20 prisoners who were hanged were in the military service of the state of North Carolina and not in the military service of the Confederate States. As such, "in the opinion of the board, a Confederate States court-martial had no jurisdiction over them." In other words, because these 20 men were in the North Carolina military and not in the

Confederate States' army, these men, technically, never deserted from the Confederate States' army and were therefore not subject to prosecution by the Confederate States' military, but only by the state of North Carolina.

Based on the testimonies of the 28 witnesses, the board of inquiry named several individuals in its report who were "directly implicated in the execution," including "General Pickett, who ordered the execution." The board asserted that these individuals "have violated the rules of war and every principle of humanity, and are guilty of crimes too heinous to be excused by the United States government." The board ended its report by recommending "that there should be a military commission immediately appointed for the trial of these men, and to inflict upon the perpetrators of such crimes their just punishment."

The board's report, which was submitted in November 1865, was sent to Joseph Holt, the judge advocate general of the army, who earlier in 1865 was the chief prosecutor in the trial of the Lincoln conspirators. Holt wrote a two-page assessment of the board's report, and his assessment, which is dated December 12, 1865, was not at all supportive of action against Pickett and the others named in the report. Holt wrote that the board "misapprehended" the testimony regarding the military status of the executed men, and he maintained that the men who were hanged were, in fact, "in the confederate service." However, Holt curiously added that the executed men had a duty to do the exact thing that led to their execution, that is, "it was their bounden duty, as men and as patriots, to flee at the first opportunity." Holt further added that "it is the opinion of this office…that the blood of these murdered men should cry in vain from their dishonored graves for vengeance." But Holt concluded that his office "finds in the evidence submitted to it no grounds upon which personal charges could be established and sustained against the guilty parties."

Holt's primary reason for concluding this is because the board of inquiry did not, in Holt's opinion, firmly establish "by whom or by whose order these sufferers were arrested and prosecuted; by whom tried, condemned, or executed." Holt's recommendation was to return all of the papers in the case to the commander of the Department of North Carolina with instructions to conduct "further and minute investigations" in order to identify the "individuals who can be held responsible" for the hangings by "collecting testimony that will be likely to establish such guilt." If that could be accomplished, then, in Holt's opinion, it would be possible "to prepare charges against such parties, and forthwith appoint a military commission for their trial."

The commander of the Department of North Carolina did exactly as Holt recommended. This second board of inquiry met during the first three months of 1866 and obtained testimony from 20 witnesses, only one of whom was among the witnesses who testified to the first board. The objective of the second board was to determine responsibility for the hangings. In its report, dated March 29, 1866, the second board indicated that it was unable to find any records of the courts-

martial of the 22 men who were hanged. Nevertheless, the testimony of the witnesses, most of whom were government officials or military officers in North Carolina during the Civil War, led the board to state, "It is also proven that Major General G. E. Pickett was in command of the rebel forces at the times of these various executions" and "that he gave the orders for their execution, and that no other officer in the rebel department of Eastern North Carolina had authority to order an execution but him." The board therefore concluded, "While other prominent rebels seem to have been concerned in these shameful transactions as accessories, the evidence clearly shows that General Pickett was the prominent authority under whose direction everything connected with the murder of our soldiers took place."

Ironically, even before the second board had finished its proceedings and written its report, Joseph Holt, the judge advocate general, altered the opinion that he expressed in his assessment of the first board's report. This came about because Holt, after writing that assessment, requested that John Peck, the commander of the District of North Carolina at the time of the hangings, send Holt his 1864 correspondence with Pickett. Peck did so, and Pickett's sarcastic February 17, 1864 message to Peck played a pivotal role in prompting Holt to change his earlier opinion that responsibility for the hangings could not be assigned to any person or persons. Holt expressed this in a letter to the Bureau of Military Justice in the War Department, in which he informed the bureau of his new recommendation regarding the matter of the Kinston hangings.

Holt wrote that, with regard to the hangings, "the imperious and vaunting temper" of Pickett's message indicates "his readiness to commit this or any kindred atrocity." Holt wrote further that Pickett's "boastful admissions that he was in command at the time (and) that the twenty-two men, of whose names he furnishes a list, had been executed…tend to show that he was in responsible command, and furnish evidence upon which it is believed charges can be sustained against him." Holt ended his sharply worded letter by recommending that "charges be preferred against the said G. E. Pickett" and a "trial ordered." Holt continued, "As a preliminary step to such trial it is suggested that Pickett be at once arrested and held to await it, upon the evidence furnished in his correspondence adverted to, which is deemed abundantly sufficient to warrant such arrest." In all likelihood, Holt did not know that in 1864 John Peck made a prediction to Pickett that the government would take steps to avenge the hangings and that the blood of the hanged men would rest on Pickett. Holt's recommendation was the vehicle by which that prediction was now coming to pass, and, fittingly, Pickett's derisive letter to Peck was a major factor in that prediction coming true.

Sometime during the lengthy process of the U.S. military's investigation of the Kinston hangings, Pickett became aware that something was afoot, and this made him fearful of potential prosecution and possible punishment. Pickett's response to his dilemma was to move himself, his wife Sallie, and his young son George Jr. to Montreal, Canada. Pickett also took an assumed surname (Edwards) and changed his appearance by cutting his long hair. Clearly, now that the noose was

potentially on the other neck, Pickett experienced a considerable reduction in the cockiness that emboldened him at the time that he wrote his sneering message to Peck. Given the hostile mood in the North, Pickett's prospects looked bleak, and his only recourse was the slim hope for a favorable resolution of the matter of the Kinston hangings. To facilitate such a resolution, Pickett wrote a letter to Ulysses Grant, the commanding general of the U.S. Army, and asked Grant to use his influence to intercede on Pickett's behalf.

In that letter, Pickett used the sort of self-serving language that is in keeping with the vain person that those who knew Pickett and those who served with him knew Pickett to be. For example, Pickett wrote that "certain evil-disposed persons are attempting to re-open the troubles of the past." He also wrote that in making this request to Grant, "I have pledged you my honor as an officer and a gentleman." With regard to the executed men, Pickett claimed that the "evidence in the cases being perfectly unmistakeable [sic], they were found guilty," and he insisted that the "sentences…were duly executed according to the custom of war in like cases." Pickett ended his letter to Grant by proclaiming that he was "appealing to you as a soldier," and that he was "feeling confident you will appreciate my position."

Pickett's request found fertile ground, because Grant wrote a sympathetic letter to President Andrew Johnson "with the recommendation that clemency be extended in this case, or assurances given that no trial will take place for the offences charged against G. E. Pickett." Although Grant conceded that, with respect to the hangings, the "punishment was a harsh one," he added that "Gen. Pickett I know personally to be an honorable man, but in this case his judgment prompted him to do what cannot well be sustained." Grant ended by stating, "I do not see how good, either to the friends of the deceased, or by fixing an example for the future, can be secured by his trial now." Grant also posited that if Pickett were prosecuted, then this "would only open up the question whether or not the Government did not disregard its contract entered into to secure the surrender of an armed enemy." Despite the extensive time and effort put into the post-war investigation of the Kinston hangings, and despite the decision by the judge advocate general to bring Pickett to trial, Grant's brief two-paragraph letter put an end to the potential prosecution. This made it possible for Pickett to reside in the U.S. unencumbered by the issue of the hangings, which he did until his death in 1875 at the age of 50.

Did George Pickett commit a war crime? An author of an article about the Kinston hangings wrote, "Where does military discipline end and atrocity begin?" Pickett was never charged with a war crime or made to stand trial. This was obviously fortunate for him and may have resulted not from the merits of the case, but from the intercession of Ulysses Grant. Nevertheless, a sizable number of people, including some who served in the Union army, felt that Pickett should have been tried, if only to adjudicate his case in order to render a final and official decision. Since Pickett was never convicted of a war crime, then, technically and officially, he was not guilty of one. But while Pickett evaded the ignominy of a war crime on his historical record, he did not

avoid a widely known and permanent connection to the failed Pickett's Charge, and he did not escape a lesser known and indelible responsibility for the cruel deed of Pickett's Charged.

Author's note: The reports of the two boards of inquiry are contained in a booklet that was prepared by the War Department for the U.S. House of Representatives. This booklet also contains the correspondence between George Pickett and John Peck as well as Joseph Holt's assessments of the two boards' reports, other of Holt's letters, and the testimonies of all the witnesses for the two boards of inquiry. Pickett's letter to Ulysses Grant and Grant's letter supporting Pickett are contained in a short book about the Kinston hangings (46 pages) that was written by Rush Hawkins. Hawkins was a Union officer who was instrumental in the recruitment of North Carolinians into the Union army. For those interested in the entire text of the reports and the entire text of the letters, both the War Department booklet and Hawkins' book are available online as downloadable PDFs. The URLs for the booklet and for Hawkins' book are given below in the sources.

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Lee's Retreat after Gettysburg

By Dennis Keating

In the January 2024 issue of The Charger, I told the story of the two Beck brothers (my German-American ancestors on my mother's side of the family) in the Civil War. In the case of William, he served in Company H of the 168th Pennsylvania Infantry. It was a 90-day unit. After being stationed in the South, in June, 1863 it was sent to Harper's Ferry. Following the battle of

Gettysburg and the retreat of Lee's army to cross the Potomac back to Virginia, the regiment briefly joined the pursuing federal army at Boonesboro, Maryland, but did not see combat. Writing to his sister, General John Sedgwick, commander of the Sixth Corps of the Army of the Potomac, wrote:

"You will hear of the immense reinforcements that are being sent to this army, and wonder why we did not crush their army. All the troops sent to us are thirty days' militia and nine month volunteers, and are perfectly useless."

Thus, Meade could not depend on these men to play a significant role in an assault on Lee's lines, and he said as much in his own writings. (Wittenberg, et al., Page 321)

The 168th Pennsylvania mustered out on July 25, 1863.

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We'll Keep the Light on for You: A Tale of Two Lighthouse Keepers

By Brian D. Kowell © September 2026

Up and up, I climbed those circular steps. . .216,217, 218. . . 219 (finally) and out onto the observation platform of the black and white striped St. Augustine lighthouse, 165 feet tall. While I was taking in the marvelous view, the docent explained that construction of the lighthouse began in 1871 and finished in 1874 when it activated its Fresnel lens and sent out its beacon over the harbor and out to the Atlantic Ocean.[1]

This was not the first lighthouse in St. Augustine, he explained, pointing out to a channel to the east where the old lighthouse, erected before the Civil War, once stood. Over time, due to steady erosion and encroachment from the sea, both the old lighthouse and keeper's home crumbled and today they lie beneath the waters of the channel.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, the Confederates commandeered and operated the lighthouse. Due to the tightening of the Union blockade of the east coast, the Confederates darkened the light so the Yankees could not use it as a guide to invade St. Augustine. Unfortunately, the darkened beacon did not help either Confederate privateers or blockade runners.

On August 18, 1861, the Confederate privateer *Jefferson Davis* encountered severe weather off the coast of St. Augustine. Unable to safely enter the inlet and being pursued by Union ships, the *Jefferson Davis* struck and grounded on the sandbar at 7:30 a.m. Firing her guns for assistance, the townspeople came, rescuing all hands and landing them safely at St. Augustine.

The history of the brig *Jefferson Davis* is an interesting one. Built in Baltimore in 1845, she had originally been named *Putnam*. Operating first out of Philadelphia for five years, she had a series of owners and operated out of Providence, Boston and New York before ending up in New Orleans in 1857. There her new owners altered the ship for the illegal slave trade and renamed her *Echo*.

A year later, the U.S.S. *Dolphin* captured the *Echo* and her cargo of 318 African slaves and brought them into Charleston, South Carolina. A young soldier from Fort Moultrie, Sgt. William Harn, was assigned to guard the ship as the slaves were transferred to another vessel and shipped to Liberia. The prize court renamed the ship *Putnam* and sold her.

The new owners had a new purpose in mind for her. After Fort Sumter fell, the owners re-christened the brig *Jefferson Davis* and operated her as a Confederate privateer sailing out of Charleston. She preyed on Union shipping, collecting nine merchant ships, which made her one of the most successful privateers, until she was chased and grounded at St. Augustine.[2]

On March 11, 1862, the city of St. Augustine surrendered without violence to United States naval forces under Commander C.R.P. Rodgers. Union infantry commanded by Colonel Louis Bell of the 4th New Hampshire Infantry soon occupied the town and fort.[3]

Before the Union forces came ashore, the Confederate harbor master, Paul Arnau, removed the lighthouse lens and other instruments and hid them. Arnau was captured and when asked where the lens and instruments were, refused to answer. He was held in solitary confinement off shore on one of the Yankee ships, until he was forced to reveal the location of the pilfered implements.[4]

Once the lens was recovered, the United States government continued to operate the lighthouse through the war and after. In October 1874, the construction of the new lighthouse was completed and the new lighthouse keeper arrived with his family. His name was William Harn, the same man who, as a soldier in Charleston Harbor, guarded the *Echo*.

William Alexander Harn was a veteran of the Civil War. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1834, little is known of his early years. In 1854, Harn, at the age of 19, enlisted in the U.S. Army and served in Company E, 1st U.S. Artillery.[5]

Harn rose to the rank of sergeant and was one of the 80 officers and men of Companies E and H stationed at Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island in Charleston harbor. One of Harn's best friends was the 42-year-old Irishman, ordnance sergeant James Skillin. Skillin, along with his wife Ruby and 16-year-old daughter Katherine (Katie) Harriett Skillin, was posted to Castle Pickney. He was the lone soldier stationed there. His major duty was the lighthouse keeper and chief of maintenance of the cannons and the ammunition of the fort. Harn would regularly row his bateau, *Katy*, across the harbor to visit Skillin. Eventually, Harn fell in love with pretty Katie Skillin and enjoyed spending time with her on his increasingly frequent visits.[6]

With the election of Abraham Lincoln as the 16th President of the United States, sectional tensions in Charleston reached a boiling point. Kentucky-born Maj. Robert Anderson was sent by the War Department to command the U.S. troops at Fort Moultrie. It was hoped that the assignment of Anderson to this role would help to relieve some tension, since he was a Southerner by birth, but this was not to be. On December 20, 1860, South Carolina seceded from the Union.

The new commander saw Castle Pinckney as a key to any Federal defense. "The brave ordnance-sergeant Skillin begged hard that we would send him a few artillerists," remembered Capt. Abner Doubleday. Being within a mile of Charleston, Castle Pinckney "could easily control the city by means of its mortars and heavy artillery. . . [Skillin] could not bear the thought of surrendering the work to the enemies."[7]

Anderson also realized he could not defend Fort Moultrie and, on the night of December 26, he secretly moved his troops to unfinished Fort Sumter instead of Castle Pinckney. Sumter was a newer and bigger fort. Thinking he could not spare the soldiers to man both forts, thus dividing his forces, Anderson sent only Lt. R.K. Meade and a few workers from Sumter to reinforce Castle Pinckney.[8]

On December 27, Lt. Meade sent Sgt. Skillin into Charleston to test the tenor of the Charlestonians. Skillin was a native of Westbrook, Maine and a 21-year veteran with experience in the Mexican-American War. He observed the Southerners. To Skillen the Charlestonians appeared like bees around a disturbed hive – they were angry about Anderson's clandestine maneuver. Skillin also noticed the local militia units rapidly forming with knapsacks and guns on the Citadel's green. He hurriedly slipped back to report.[9]

Later that day, three companies of Charleston militia under the command of Col. James J. Pettigrew and under orders from the South Carolina governor, seized Castle Pinckney without a fight, there being only being Lt. Meade and James Skillin and his family facing 150 men. (The workers in Castle Pinckney refused to get involved.) Despite being a native Virginian and West Point-trained, 25-year-old Meade found himself grossly outnumbered and with little he could do to prevent the fort's seizure. With arms folded across his chest, he defiantly protested their presence, saying he did not recognize the authority of the South Carolina governor's orders to seize Castle Pinckney. Meade further declared that he would not formally surrender the U.S. fort. As for Skillin, he was furious with these uninvited intruders declaring, "Damn it! This is a pretty thing to happen to a U.S. fort."[10]

The American flag was pulled down and replaced with a red flag emblazoned with a single white star. Katie Skillin was seen crying nearby a Southern militia officer. The officer tried to comfort her assuring her that she and her family would not be harmed. "That's not why I'm crying," Katie answered. "Then what is it?" asked the officer. "I am crying because you have put that miserable rag up there." She mockingly added that it certainly took a lot of very brave fellows to capture a fort occupied by only two soldiers and a girl.[11]

Meade, along with Skillin and his family, were transported to Charleston, where Meade asked his captors for considerate treatment of Skillin and his family. On February 3, Ruby and Katie joined 40 other women and children who had been at Fort Sumter. They boarded the steamer *Marion* and departed Charleston for Ft. Hamilton, New York. Meade and Skillin were released and allowed to re-join the garrison at Fort Sumter.[12]

Harn and Skillin, once more united, faced the grueling 34 hours of bombardment on April 12-13, 1861 and were surrendered with the rest of Anderson's command. Anderson's men were allowed to salute their colors before boarding the steamer *Baltic* and steaming for New York. Arriving on April 18, the "two companies, E & H, settled for some weeks at Fort Hamilton where they were reunited with their families."[13]

When Lincoln called for troops to put down the rebellion, most of the men and officers of the two companies became scattered as they were assigned or volunteered to various regiments. Harn's and Skillin's service records were quite different.

William Harn enlisted as a lieutenant in the 1st New York Light Artillery, Battery E. He transferred to Battery G before being again transferred to the 3rd New York Independent Light Artillery of which he took command after the Battle of Antietam in September 1862.

Harn's battery joined others on Stafford Heights across the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg in December and participated in the bombardment of that city. During the Chancellorsville campaign, Harn saw action in the VI Corps' storming of Marye's Heights and its follow-up to Salem Church, where the guns of the 3rd New York successfully repulsed a Confederate charge before being ordered to withdraw across the Rappahannock River.

On June 4, 1863, Harn was commissioned captain and marched to Gettysburg as part of Gen. Sedgwick's VI Corps. On July 3, Harn's battery supported Alexander Hays' division in repulsing the Pickett-Pettigrew charge. Harn's battery was active during the Bristoe campaign as well as at Rappahannock Station and Mine Run before going into winter quarters at Brandy Station.[14]

With the battery's term of service about to expire, Harn and most of the men in the battery re-enlisted and were granted a "veteran furlough," returning to New York City for thirty days. From there, Harn traveled to Maine where he married 19-year-old Katherine Skillin.[15]

Returning to the Army of the Potomac, Harn was dismissed from military service with the 3rd New York Independent Battery on April 5, 1864, but was reinstated 15 days later on April 20, 1864. The reason for this dismissal and reinstatement is unclear. Harn served in the bloody battles of the Overland Campaign and received a brevet major appointment for gallant and meritorious

services for his actions at Spotsylvania Court House. He continued serving through the Petersburg and Appomattox Campaigns, and mustered out at the end of the war on June 24, 1865.[16]

James Skillin's Civil War record is not easy to discern. In fact, it is murky. Brian Swartz, Maine Civil War Historian, and author of the *Maine at War* blog, referred to Skillin as a "slippery character." Using information from soldiers' files in the Maine State Archives, the state census records and cemetery records, Swartz found a James R. Skillin enlisting as a private in Company C, 2nd Maine Regiment on April 27, 1861 who was discharged at Willets Point, New York on June 9, 1861. The reason was "Dis[charged] for Dis[ease]." Unfortunately, the age in the file states Skillin was 26 years old at the time of enlistment. For a man born on December 25, 1821, (according to Skillin's burial records) this is more than 14 years off. He might have falsified his age or perhaps the clerk made an error.

A second file for James P. Skillin found in the archives shows a 40-year-old who enlisted in the 10th Maine Infantry Regiment on August 5, 1862 and was "discharged by order" on February 19, 1863. In this instance the age is more appropriate. Some records show Skillin supposedly re-enlisting a number of times, the sixth and last time at the Rome Arsenal in New York in 1864. Each time he was discharged as an invalid.[17]

Whichever Sgt. Skillin and whatever his record, he survived the war. On October 11, 1865, Skillin and his wife Ruby returned to Charleston and to his post as lighthouse keeper at Castle Pinckney. William and Katie Harn followed her parents to Charleston, where William became a partner with N. Sherhammer establishing a wholesale and retail bar/liquor store at the southeast corner of Broad and Church Streets. In addition, through Skillin's patronage, William on occasion helped at the Morris Island Lighthouse.[18]

In August of 1869, Skillin's assistant, a Private Johnson, returned to Castle Pinckney at noon in a highly intoxicated state. Wishing to go back to Charleston to continue his revelry, Johnson requested to be relieved of his duty so he could return to the city but Skillin denied his request. A petulant Johnson then refused to obey Skillin's order to resume work around the fort. Words flew and the confrontation became heated with Johnson's declaration that he would kill Skillin. Johnson raced up the stairs to the parapet to grab a rifle. Skillin followed and was met at the top of the stairs by Johnson holding a loaded rifle aimed at the sergeant. A startled Skillin raised his left hand in defense but before a word was spoken Johnson pulled the trigger. The bullet, cut off Skillin's left forefinger, then plowed through his left breast, and ultimately exited through his shattered shoulder blade.

Ruby, hearing the altercation and then a gunshot, rushed to her husband's aid. Johnson, suddenly sobered by his actions and realizing the gravity of what he had done, jumped into a small boat and raced to Charleston, not to escape, but to bring help. He brought back a Dr. Bailey. Skillin's severe wound was at first thought to be fatal. Johnson was arrested by a squad of soldiers who arrived from the Citadel.

Skillin miraculously survived his wound. During his lengthy recovery between 1870-1875, William helped run the lighthouse for his disabled friend and father-in-law. Through political patronage and Skillin's recommendation, William joined the U.S. Lighthouse Service. In 1875, as

an invalid, James, along with Ruby, returned to Maine where James received a government pension and became a farmer.[19]

By this time, the U.S. Lighthouse Service was constructing a new 165-foot, brick lighthouse tower in St. Augustine, Florida. Once completed, in October 1875, William was appointed the Head Lighthouse Keeper in St. Augustine. William, Katie, and their five daughters moved to Florida, residing for a year in the old lighthouse keeper's home until a new one was finished in 1876. They were the first family to live in the new home and their sixth daughter was born there. Harn was the lighthouse keeper for the next 14 years and witnessed the destruction of both the old lighthouse and the old keeper's house, as well as, two earthquakes and a number of hurricanes. The Harns were welcomed into the St. Augustine community and earned a reputation for hospitality, including serving lemonade to visitors.[20]

In 1887, William, now 53-years-old, began to suffer from the effects of tuberculosis. He had probably contracted the disease during his Civil War service. The disease progressed, and two years later, he died on May 31, 1889 at 1:00 a.m. He was buried in Evergreen Cemetery in St. Augustine.[21]

By June 4, the community of St. Augustine petitioned the government to appoint Katie Harn as lighthouse keeper to replace her husband so she could support her family. Due to this effort, Katie became 2nd Assistant and served for six months before she secured William's military pension. She then moved her family into town for a few years, before moving back to her home state of Maine.[22]

Katie Harn was reunited with her mother and father in Enfield, Maine where her parents had their farm. On May 22, 1897, James Skillin died and was buried in Enfield Village Cemetery. He lived 6 years longer than William Harn.[23]

James Killin and William A. Harn were two soldiers who became friends. They both served in the American Civil War and became related by marriage. As lighthouse keepers at St. Augustine and Castle Pinckney respectively, both faithfully served in keeping the lights on as essential guardians of maritime trade.

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[1] "Frequently Asked Questions by Lighthouse Visitors," St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum, accessed 9/2/2026. Frequently Asked Questions by Lighthouse Visitors - St Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum

[2]Zielinski, Paul, Director of Interpretation, St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum, January 21, 2015. Logbook of the *Jefferson Davis*, August 18, 1861.

[3] King, Tom, "In War Between the States, St. Augustine Surrendered Hundred Years Ago," *St. Augustine Record*, St. Augustine, Florida, March 11, 1962. Redd, Robert, *St. Augustine and the Civil War,* Charleston, SC: History Press, 2014. Covert, Robert, "Occupation and Reconstruction: St. Augustine After the Civil War," St. Augustine Historical Society, Special Collections Occupation and Reconstruction: St. Augustine After the Civil War - St Augustine Historical Society

[4] Redd, *St. Augustine and the Civil War*, p. 24. Zielinski, Paul, "Keepers of the Light," St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum, March 29, 2017. Keepers of the Light - St Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum

[5] Historical Data Systems, Inc., U.S. Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865, U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865 - Ancestry.com

[6] Doubleday, Abner, *Reminiscences of Forts Moultrie and Sumter in 1860-1861,* New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1876, p. 15. The Project Gutenberg eBook of Reminiscences of Forts Sumter and Moultrie in 1860–'61, by Abner

Doubleday. Roberts, Clifford W., Jr., and Locke, Matthew A.M., *Holding Charleston by the Bridle: Castle Pickney and the Civil War*, El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2005, p. 54. Carr, Jo Ann Daly, "The Families of Fort Sumter and the Crib Left Behind," *Battlefield Photographer: Journal of the Center for Civil War Photography, Vol. XXII, Issue 3,* December 2024, p. 9. Reed, Jan, "Kate Harn for Jo Ann Carr." Unpublished Document, 2019. *Charleston Dailey Courier,* May 20, 1856. Register of Officers & Agents, Civil, Military, and Naval in the Service of the United States on September 30, 1857, Washington, A.O.P. Nicholson Publishers & Printers, 1857, p. 33. 10055573A Lights, beacons and buoys were all needed to help navigation in Charleston harbor. Lighthouses were erected at Fort Sumter and Castle Pinckney. Pinckney's light was a red-beaconed Fresnel lens placed atop a yellow-painted, open wood tower that stood 50 feet above the low water mark.

[7] Doubleday, *Reminiscences*, p. 53.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Military files of James Skillin, National Park Service, Fort Moultrie Visitor's Center, Sullivan's Island, South Carolina. Roberts & Locke, *Holding Charleston*, p. 60.

[10] Doubleday, *Reminiscences*, p. 73. Detzer, David, *Allegiance: Fort Sumter, Charleston, and the Beginning of the Civil War*, New York, NY: Harcourt, Inc., 2001, p. 134.

[11] Doubleday, *Reminiscences*, p. 73. Detzer, *Allegiance*, pp. 134-135.

[12] Swanberg, W.A., *First Blood: The Story of Fort Sumter,* New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957, pp. 107-108. Carr, "Families of Fort Sumter," p. 13. Shortly after the fall of Fort Sumter, Lt. Richard K. Meade resigned his commission and joined the Confederate States Army as a Major of Engineers. He contracted an illness and died in 1862 at the age of 26 years-old.

[13] Detzer, *Allegiance,* pp. 311-313. Doubleday, *Reminiscences*, pp. 174-175.

[14] Phisterer, Frederick, *New York in the War of the Rebellion*, vol. 2, Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Co., 1912, pp 1215, 1225, 1566. "3rd Independent Battery Light Artillery (Veteran)," New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center. 3rd Independent Battery Light Artillery (Veteran) :: New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center

[15] *Maine Marriage Records*, 1713-1922, Augusta, Maine, Maine State Archives Cultural Building

[16] Phisterer, *New York in the War,* pp. 1566, 393. The reason for his dismissal is not preserved in the general public historical overviews. It might be found in his compiled service records in the National Archives. A rapid reversal of dismissal during the Civil War typically stemmed from common bureaucratic mistakes such as administrative clerical errors due to mixed up names or ranks; or absence overages (which could have been Harn's transgression in view of his recent marriage in Maine) or due to minor technical disagreements with senior ordnance or artillery commanders.

[17] Soldiers file for James R. Skillin from the *Maine State Archives*. Soldier's file for James P. Skillin from the *Maine State Archives*, accessed by Brian Swartz September 15, 2026. Roberts & Locke, *Holding Charleston,* p. 164. Skillin's headstone does not list a middle initial.

[18] Roberts & Locke, *Holding Charleston*, pp. 164-165. Zielinski, Paul, "Lighthouse History 1874-1894 (Part II)," St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum, St. Augustine, Florida, January 21, 2015. Lighthouse History 1874 – 1894 (Part II) - St Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum Skillin returning in 1865 and serving until 1875 would be the longest-serving lighthouse keeper in the station's history.

[19] Roberts & Locke, *Holding Charleston*, p. 172. "Shooting Affray at Castle Pinckney," *Charleston [SC] Courier,* August 2, 1869, p. 1. Skillin pension, U.S. Civil War Pension Index, 1861-1900, NARA, Record Group 15, T289, Washington, D.C.

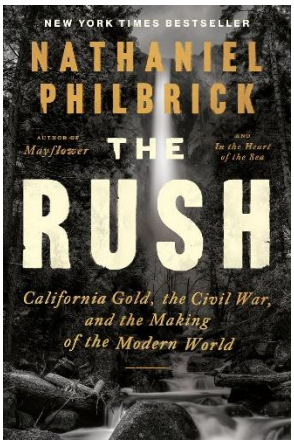
[20] St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum, History - St Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum

[21] William A. Harn, *Find a Grave.* William A. Harn (1834-1889) - Find a Grave Memorial

[22] Zielinski, "Lighthouse History," Lighthouse History 1874 – 1894 (Part II) - St Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum and "Keepers of the Light," Keepers of the Light - St Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum

[23] James Skillin Find a Grave. James Skillin (1821-1897) - Find a Grave Memorial

BOOK REVIEW



Nathaniel Philbrick. *The Gold Rush: California Gold, the Civil War, and the Making of the Modern World* (Viking, 2026)

You, like me, may wonder what the California gold rush had to do with the Civil War. In this book, Nathaniel Philbrick not only writes about the gold rush and later the building of the transcontinental railroad, but he also enlightens us about the attempts of Southerners to extend slavery to California and to enable the Confederacy to have access to the new state's gold:

"This is the story of how gold at Sutter's Mill sent the nation hurtling toward a reckoning not only with slavery but with its geographic immensity. At the center of the narrative is the clash between California's two U.S. senators: the handsome confidence man from Mississippi who set out to align the free state of California with the South and the brash political boss from New York whose death in a duel threatened to fulfill Southern designs on California's gold." (pp. 8-9)

The Southerner was William Gwin, a wealthy newcomer to the state. In 1850, he realized his aim to become not only California's longer serving U.S. Senator over John Fremont but also with control over its federal patronage positions. Fremont, who played such an important role in California after its acquisition following the U.S. victory in the Mexican war, would fade from the political scene there (but would be the new Republican party's first presidential candidate in the 1856 election). Gwin's pro-slavery support group became known as "The Chivalry". Opposing him in San Francisco and later as a U.S. Senator was David Broderick, whose pro-Union following became known as "The Shovelry". In the Summer of 1859, Broderick returned to California and toured the state, attacking Gwin and his efforts to promote slavery in California (even if it meant dividing California into two separate states).

Then, unexpectedly California Supreme Court Justice David Terry, criticized Broderick and challenged him to a duel. On September 13, 1859, they met outside San Francisco and Terry shot Broderick, who died a few days later. The funeral eulogy was delivered by the newly-elected Republican U.S. Senator from Oregon, Edward Baker, close friend of Abraham Lincoln (and who was later killed at the battle of Ball's Bluff on October 21, 1861). In Broderick's place as leader of the Republican opposition to Gwin was a young Unitarian minister from Boston who arrived in San Francisco in April, 1860 – Thomas Starr King. He proved to be an excellent orator and formidable foe of Gwin. In a Senate speech, Gwin said if the Southern states seceded from the Union, California – and all its gold – "would be found with the south." (p. 256) When Gwin's idea

of creating a separate Southern California state was rejected, he proposed that it secede and become part of a western Pacific republic (it also failed).

Another foe of slavery arrived in San Francisco from Boston - Mary Ellen Pleasant (known as "Mammy"). A former slave, she was freed and married a wealthy Boston abolitionist. After his death, she moved to San Francisco where she became wealthy herself through ownership of laundries and a boardinghouse. She helped to establish the western terminus of the Underground Railroad. In the Spring of 1858, she went to a meeting in Chatham, Ontario convened by John Brown. She agreed to financially help his plan to organize a slave revolt in Virginia and also to contact slaves to recruit them to join the revolt. However, before her efforts in Virginia took hold, Brown launched his unsuccessful raid, resulting in his execution.

With Lincoln's election (he barely won California) and the secession of the Southern states, there was fear of the possible release of federal arsenals and their weapons in California to pro-Southerners. However, the federal commander in California Texan Albert Sidney Johnston refused to do that. In Winter, 1861, Gwin was defeated for re-election and later returned to his plantation near Vicksburg.

Californians would support the Union, with 17,000 volunteering to serve in the army and its residents raised the largest sum of any state in support of the U. S. Sanitary Commission.

The Confederacy did attempt a campaign to capture the gold fields in Colorado and open the way to California. However, the Henry Sibley expedition from Texas was decisively defeated on March 28,1862 at the battle of Glorieta Pass in New Mexico. This confirmed Union control of the Far West.

Philbrick explains in detail pro-Southern attempts to legalize slavery in the new state of California and to promote the possibility of Southern control of California's gold. Most of the 16 chapters relate to the Civil War-related history of the state. Over the entire period that he covers, Philbrick introduces us to many of the characters (including William Tecumseh Sherman) involved in this saga. This story captures much of the widening political divide in California and the United States that led to the Civil War. I would recommend his fascinating tale of California's experience leading up to the Civil War.

In an Epilogue, Philbrick profiles 34 of the characters in his book.

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~~Dennis Keating