



The Signal Flag

BRANDYWINE VALLEY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Campaign # 22

Skirmish # 4

December 2008

From the Rear Ranks:

CHRISTMAS DURING THE CIVIL WAR

Many of today's American Christmas customs are rooted in the early 19th century. Perhaps ironically, they came to maturity during the Civil War, when violence, chaos, and staggering personal losses seemed likely to drown out the choruses of "Peace on Earth".

Many of the artists of the period, Winslow Homer, Thomas Nast, and Alfred Waud created visual chronicles of the spreading influence of many holiday traditions we enjoy today, including Santa Claus, Christmas trees, gift-giving, caroling, holiday feasting, and Christmas cards/

Nast and Homer drew scenes of the wartime practice of sending Christmas boxes filled with homemade clothes and food items to soldiers at the front. The war made an impact on the nation, both North and South, in ways Christmas was observed.

The most beloved symbol of the American family Christmas – the decorated Christmas tree – came into its own during the Civil War. Christmas trees had become popular in the decade before the war, and in the early 1860's, many families were beginning to decorate them. Illustrators working for the national weeklies helped popularize the practice of putting decorated tabletop Christmas trees in their drawings.

On the home front, the homes were mostly decorated with different kinds of pines, holly, ivy and mistletoe. While there were many families who spent lonely Christmases during the war, they still had a Christmas tree, which was the centerpiece for the home. Most trees were small and sat on a table

May the Spirit of Christmas bring you Peace and Happiness now and throughout the New Year.

The Executive Board of the Brandywine Valley Civil War Round Table, December 2008.



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~ Official Sutler ~

Bob Sprague: Books / Periodicals
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~ Annual Membership ~

Individual \$25.00; Family \$40.00; Student \$15.00
(Full time student up to age 23)

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Unsolicited articles from our members are welcome.
Please contact Lynne!

**We are wheelchair assessable*



What is the BVCWRT all about???

We were founded in 1987. According to our by-laws, "the purpose of the Brandywine Valley Civil War Round Table shall be to provide a congenial medium through which persons having a common interest in the events of the American Civil War - its causes and effects, engagements, personages, units, armaments and other things pertaining thereto - may satisfy their interest and broaden individual knowledge through discussion, lectures, field trips and the exchange of books, paper and other data. The purposed is also to consider the preservation and protection of the battlefields, sites, landmarks, relics and collection of the period."

In plain English, we are an organization of diverse people brought together by our common interest in the American Civil War. This interest can range from the casual to the obsessive. We intend to tailor our activities and presentations to appeal to all our members, novice or expert.

Welcome New Members & Reenlistments

The Round Table welcomes our new members since our last meeting. Please welcome them and share your Civil War enthusiasm.

New Members:





Brandywine Valley Civil War Round Table
Come to our next meeting
December 3, 2008

Speaker: Old Fashion Round Table and Christmas Social

Topic: "Questions for discussed"

Time: 7:00 PM

Place: West Chester Borough Hall, Gay Street

Our meeting will be held in Room 204 adjacent to the big room. The Council called an emergency meeting for Wednesday so we will meet in the small room this month. Our social will follow.

This is our third or fourth year holding an Old Fashion Round Table in December followed by our Christmas Social. We will be discussing the following questions.

1. *Discuss the roles of political Generals in the war. Did any have noteworthy contributions? Did they hurt or help the causes of each side?*
2. *Abraham Lincoln came into office with little military experience. Discuss the aspects of his personality and other traits that allowed him to develop into one of our greatest wartime presidents.*

Remember, if you have signed up to bring something for the Christmas Social, please don't forget to bring it on Wednesday.



Editor's Note

PLEASE DO NOT FORGET TO PAY YOUR DUES. Please fill out the attached membership form and bring it to our meeting on Wednesday, November 5, with your check. All dues should be given to our Treasurer, Dave Walter.

We are still hoping for volunteers to fill some open positions on the Executive Board, we need the following people; someone to organize Trips, someone for the Nominating Committee and Credentials. If you are interested, please contact the President or any member of the Executive Board. These positions do not require much of your time so please consider volunteering.

We have all watched our Nation going through many ups and down this year. I know the most frustrating event of this year for me, as well as many of you, have been watching our 401Ks, our hopes for retirement, quickly deplete. I, for one, am hoping for a better 2009, that is if we have any money left by the end of the year to go into 2009. On behalf of the Round Table we wish you all a Happy Holiday and great New Year.

Lynne Fulton, Editor Signal Flag

A CIVIL WAR CHRISTMAS

What was Christmas like at the time of the Civil War? Did the Victorians have their hearts filled with Joy with all the decorations, lights and celebrations as we do today? Some research was in order. For the Soldier both North and South, his thoughts would be on family and friends at home. In camp and at the front, his mind and conversation was filled with memories of Holiday's past with loved ones. This would include the celebrations and the decorations. I'm sure they still had the active duties of soldiering like drill and guard duty, but research also shows that they also played "Rounders" (baseball) and had special meals as the Commissary permitted and supplied. The First Lady Mrs. Lincoln even raised funds plus donated food and alcohol from her personal stores at the White House for use in the hospitals in Washington City for the wounded soldiers "to brighten their day". This was especially true in December 1862 at the time of the Battle of Fredricksburg. She arranged for Christmas dinners of duck, turkey, chickens, ham and fresh apples to be delivered on Christmas Day and even visited the hospitals to ensure that the unscrupulous Hospital Stewards and surgeons did not get the best of the goodies.

O Christmas Tree

On the home front, would there have been a Christmas Tree? Chances are the answer would be yes. The first Christmas Tree in America is recorded as being erected in Cleveland Ohio in 1851. The decorations for the tree would have been homemade and very simple. Popcorn balls and strings of popcorn as well as dried fruits and nuts, perhaps mixed with wax, paper and spun glass ornaments are some examples of what would have been used. Also some colored ribbon and candles would have been used to help decorate the tree. Ornaments might be shaped like angels, doll faces, the Christ Child and animals. All would have been handmade. The tree would sit on a tabletop with unwrapped presents placed under them. Keep in mind that the candles on the tree would only be lit once (and then only for a few minutes due to fire hazard). A bucket of water would be kept close by and one of the children would be responsible for watching for fire. In addition to the tree, the entire house would be decorated with greenery such as fir, pine, holly, ivy and mistletoe. No house was considered festive without the fragrance of greenery!!

"Here We Come A Caroling"

Yes, Christmas Carols would have been sung at home and in camp. Songs such as Silent Night, Oh Come All Ye Faithful, Hark The Herald Angels Sing, and Deck the Halls were very popular. Other songs such as It Came Upon the Midnight Clear, O Little Town of Bethlehem, Away in a Manger, I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day, We Three Kings, and Up on the Housetop were all written in the 1850's. I can almost hear Soldier voices both North and South singing these songs, praising the Saviors birth and longing for home and family. Perhaps for one brief moment for them there was "Peace on Earth Goodwill toward Men" as fighting would cease for Christmas. As they sang and celebrated the Savior's birth, perhaps they longed for a new invention (1844) the Christmas card from loved ones at home. So as the Christmas Season comes each year, may we pause for a moment and reflect on how our ancestors would have celebrated. For more information, please refer to the book "*We Were Marching on Christmas Day*" by Kevin Rawlins. What a wonderful source of information to enlighten on traditions at the time of the Civil War. A Christmas wish to you and yours, A CIVIL WAR CHRISTMAS

May His JOY, His PEACE and His LOVE be with you and all you hold dear.

By: Joanne Shelby, Co. A 9th PA, "Mrs. Abraham Lincoln", A CIVIL WAR CHRISTMAS



THE CHRISTMAS CAROL SOLDIER

By Robert Girard Carroon, PCinC

Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the U.S. (October 1998)

(From the Temple website issue dated 12/19/2007)

In March 1863 a seventeen year old native of Cambridge, Massachusetts, slipped away from his home on Brattle Street, hopped aboard a train and headed for Washington D.C. to join Mr. Lincoln's Army. He was by no means the first or the last youth that simply couldn't stay home while so many of his peers were off participating in the great adventure of the Civil War, but he may have been the most prominent runaway from Boston and possibly New England that year. His name was Charles Appleton Longfellow, and his father was the great poet and literary scholar, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Charles Appleton Longfellow was the eldest son of HWL (as he referred to his father) and Fannie Elizabeth Appleton. He was born in Cambridge on June 9, 1844 and was raised in a loving family, which consisted, besides his parents, of three sisters and one brother. Charley was bright and adventurous and although he became a crack shot with a rifle, he managed to shoot off his left thumb with a shotgun (this eventually kept him out of the infantry when he sought to join the Union Army). His madcap adventures worried his parents and particularly his father. Mrs. Longfellow had died in a tragic fire in their home in 1860 and so Henry, as a single parent, was doubly responsible for his son who had disappeared into the great sea of blue, which was the Union Army.

Soon, however, the mystery was solved; on arrival in Washington Charley had gone to Captain W. H. McCartney, commanding Battery A of the 1st Massachusetts Artillery and asked to enlist. Captain McCartney, who knew the boy, did not want to enlist this young man without his parent's approval so he immediately wrote Henry Wadsworth Longfellow asking his advice. To his credit, or perhaps knowing his son's personality, HWL gave permission for Charley to enlist so the only member of the poet's family to go to war became a private in the 1st Massachusetts Artillery.

Charles Longfellow turned out to be a natural soldier. He grasped the elements of drill, camp, and military life with amazing aptitude. He became a great favorite with his fellow artillerymen and showed decided leadership skills, which commended him to his superior officers. In the meantime his father, thinking that his son might do better as an officer rather than a rough hewn enlisted man and began to contact friends, such as Senator Charles Sumner, Governor John Andrew and Dr. Edward B. Dalton, medical inspector of the Sixth Army Corps, with a view to obtaining a commission for his son. As he started to engage in this process of string pulling, Mr. Longfellow was surprised to hear that all his machinations were unnecessary-on his own merits Charley was offered a commission as a Second Lieutenant in the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry, and had accepted. He was commissioned on March 27, 1863. Charley entered on his new duties with enthusiasm and was assigned to Company "G" of the 1st Massachusetts. His first action came on the fringes of the Battle of Chancellorsville. In early June Charley came down with typhoid fever and malaria and was invalided home to recover. After recuperating Charley rejoined his unit on August 15, 1863, having missed the Battle of Gettysburg. In mid-September he was in a fight at Culpepper where quartermaster sergeant Read, who was standing next to Charley had his leg taken off by artillery round. On November 27, as part of the Mine Run Campaign, while in a skirmish during the battle of New Hope Church, Virginia, Charley was shot through the left shoulder. The bullet traveled across his back, nicked his spine, and exited under his right shoulder. He missed being paralyzed by less than an inch. He was carried into the church and then by ambulance to the Rapidan River. On December 1, 1863, word was received at the Longfellow home in Cambridge of Charles serious injury. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and his younger son, Ernest, left at once for Washington, D.C. where they finally met up with Charley and brought him home. They reached Cambridge on December 8 and Charles Appleton Longfellow began the slow process of recovering. As he sat nursing his son and giving thanks for his survival, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned the following poem:

"I heard the bells on Christmas Day"

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till, ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said,
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep;
God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men!



Charles Appleton Longfellow

Charles Appleton Longfellow

Charles Appleton Longfellow was unable to sufficiently recover from his wounds and rejoin the army. He was discharged on February 15, 1864. Charles was independently wealthy with inheritances from his grandfather, Nathan Appleton and his mother, and spent the rest of his life traveling the globe from Europe to India, Australia, Africa and the Far East, especially Japan. Charles died on April 13, 1893, in Cambridge from pneumonia and is buried in the family vault in Mt. Auburn Cemetery. The souvenirs of his travels as well as his uniforms and accoutrements from his service in the Union Army are at Longfellow House in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

On May 3, 1871, Charles Appleton Longfellow was elected a Companion of the First Class of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion through the Commandery of Massachusetts and assigned Insignia No. 1476. He was also a member of the Grand Army of the Republic and the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, where he actively participated in a number of sharpshooting contests. In July 1998, quite serendipitously, I was able to purchase from an antique dealer, a group of insignia belonging to Charles Appleton Longfellow, which consisted of His MOLLUS, GAR, and MVM sharpshooter's medals. As I am Charley's 5th cousin 3 times removed a portion of the memorabilia of the man I like to call the "Christmas Carol Soldier" has returned to his family. The items are displayed on my mantle together with a nice photo of Charles obtained from the MOLLUS Collection at the USMHI at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The medals will eventually be donated to the Longfellow House and the National Park Service to take their place with Charley's other memorabilia: but not, I hope, for a good long while. In the meantime, keep an eye out for MOLLUS Insignia-you never know who might turn up!

Note: The Christmas Carol Soldier was first published in the Fall 1998 (Vol 55, No. 3) issue of the Loyal Legion Historical Journal. Photograph of Charles Appleton Longfellow compliments of the Massachusetts Commandery, MOLLUS and the U.S. Army Military History Institute. From: <http://www.suvcw.org/mollus/art005.htm>

Christmas During the Civil War



During the years of the American Civil War, artist Thomas Nast was drawing Santa Claus wearing a blue coat with white stars over red & white striped britches.

Many of today's American Christmas customs are rooted in the early 19th century. Perhaps ironically, they came to maturity during the Civil War, when violence, chaos, and staggering personal losses seemed likely to drown out the choruses of "Peace on Earth."

Many of the artists of the period, Winslow Homer, Thomas Nast, and Alfred Waud created visual chronicles of the spreading influence of many holiday traditions we enjoy today, including Santa Claus Christmas trees, gift-giving, caroling, holiday feasting, and Christmas cards.

Nast and Homer drew scenes of the wartime practice of sending Christmas boxes filled with homemade clothes and food items to soldiers at the front. The war made an impact on the nation, both North and South, in the ways Christmas was observed.

Christmas boxes like the ones Homer and Nast pictured gave their recipients a much-needed mental and physical boost. When in 1861, for the first *Harper's Weekly* Christmas cover of the war, Homer drew overjoyed soldiers reveling in the contents of Adams Express boxes from home.

The most beloved symbol of the American family Christmas--the decorated Christmas tree--came into its own during the Civil War. Christmas trees had become popular in the decade before the war, and in the early 1860s, many families were beginning to decorate them. Illustrators working for the national weeklies helped popularize the practice by putting decorated table-top Christmas trees in their drawings.

On the home front, the homes were mostly decorated with different kinds of pines, holly, ivy and mistletoe. While there were many families who spent lonely Christmases during the war, they still had a Christmas Tree which was the centerpiece for the home. Most trees were small and sat on a table.

The decorations were mostly home made, such as strings of dried fruit, popcorn, pine cones. Colored paper, silver foil, as well as spun glass were popular choices for making decorations. Santa brought gifts to the children. Those gifts were home made, such as carved toys, cakes or fruits.

It was only a matter of time before the Christmas tree made its way into military camps. Alfred Bellard of the 5th New Jersey remarked about the arrival of the newly popular Christmas icon to his camp along the lower Potomac River.

"In order to make it look much like Christmas as possible, a small tree was stuck up in front of our tent, decked off with hard tack and pork, in lieu of cakes and oranges, etc".

Christmas carols were sung both at home and in the camps. Can you imagine how homesick the soldiers would become singing these songs. Some of the most popular ones were "Silent Night," "Away in the Manger," "Oh Come All Ye Faithful," and "Deck the Halls".

By 1863, the Union blockade of the Southern coasts had made it nearly impossible for Santa Claus to visit homes in the South; scarcity of goods and the consequent high prices put both store-bought presents and raw materials for homemade gifts out of the financial reach of many Southern consumers. Quite a few mothers explained to their children that even Santa Claus would not be able run the formidable blockade.

Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas of Augusta, Georgia, told how a simple act of faith on the part of her children caused her to dig deeper for a holiday offering on Christmas Eve:

"I have written so much that it is now after 9 o'clock and yet I have said nothing of Turner's and Mary Bell's party which we gave them last week in lieu of the Santa Claus presents. Mary Bell has been told that Santa Claus has not been able to run the blockade and has gone to war--Yet at this late hour when I went upstairs Thursday night of the party I found that the trusting faith of childhood they had hung their little socks and stockings in case Santa Claus did come. I had given the subject no thought whatever, but invoking Santa Claus aid I was enabled when their little eyes opened to enjoy their pleasure to find cake and money in their socks."

Santa Claus apparently had a much easier time visiting homes in the North than those in the South that Christmas. According to a letter Sarah Thetford sent to her brother George, *"Santa arrived in here in Michigan dressed in a buffalo coat with presents fastened to his coat-tail...and a corn-popper on his back."* She continued that she had *"often heard Santa Claus described, but never before saw the old fellow in person."*

Sometimes Santa Claus worked behind the scenes of wartime savagery to bring a bit of Christmas cheer to those who otherwise had little reason to celebrate. Following General William T. Sherman's capture of Savannah, Georgia, and presentation of it as a Christmas gift to Lincoln in 1864, about 90 Michigan men and their captain in turn gave a token of charity to Southern civilians living outside the city. Christmas Day, the soldiers loaded several wagons full of food and other supplies and distributed the items about the ravaged Georgia countryside. The destitute Southerners thanked the jolly Union Santa Clauses as the wagons pulled away under the power of mules that had tree-branch "antlers" strapped to their heads to turn them into makeshift reindeer.



As the war dragged on, deprivation replaced bounteous repasts and familiar faces were missing from the family dinner table. Soldiers used to "bringing in the tree" and caroling in church were instead scavenging for firewood and singing drinking songs around the campfire. And so the holiday celebration most associated with family and home was a contradiction. It was a joyful, sad, religious, boisterous, and subdued event.

Corporal J. C. Williams, Co. B, 14th Vermont Infantry,
December 25, 1862:

"This is Christmas, and my mind wanders back to that home made lonesome by my absence, while far away from the peace and quietude of civil life to undergo the hardships of the camp,

and may be the battle field. I think of the many lives that are endangered, and hope that the time will soon come when peace, with its innumerable blessings, shall once more restore our country to happiness and prosperity."

* * * * *

Gilbert J. Barton, Company I of Charlotte, recorded some of the hardships of camp that day:

"Dec 25th Christmas. Had hard Tack soaked in cold water and then fried in pork Greece [sic]. Fried in a canteen, split into[sic] by putting into the fire & melting the sodder[sic] off. We pick them up on the field left by other soldiers, also had coffee & pork. Ordered up at 5 this morning with guns ready, as it is reported that there are 400 Rebel Cavalry not far off prowling around. Foggy morning."

* * * * *

Robert Gould Shaw, then a 2nd lieutenant in the 2d Massachusetts Infantry, writes in 1861, about guard duty near Frederick, MD. He would later earn fame as the commander of the heroic African American unit, the 54th Massachusetts. *"It is Christmas morning and I hope a happy and merry one for you all, though it looks so stormy for our poor country, one can hardly be in merry humor."*

* * * * *

On December 24, 1861, Captain Robert Goldthwaite Carter of the 22nd Mass. Vol. Inf. 4th U.S. Cavalry wrote: *"Christmas Eve, and I am on duty as officer of the day, but I am not on duty to-morrow. As much as I desire to see you all, I would not leave my company alone...I give my company a Christmas dinner to-morrow, consisting of turkey, oysters, pies, apples, etc.; no liquors."*

* * * * *

John H. Brinton, a Major and Surgeon U.S.V. wrote: *"During the days preceding Christmas, I received some boxes from home, full of nice comfortable things, and the letter which came to me at that time, you may be sure, made me feel homesick. On Christmas night, I left for St. Louis as my teeth were troubling me, and greatly in need of the services of a dentist. I was fortunate in finding a good one, and in a day or two the necessary repairs were made."*

* * * * *

From the diary of Private Robert A. Moore, a Confederate soldier: *Tuesday, Dec 24th, 1861, camp near Swan's... "This is Christmas Eve but seems but little like it to me"*

Wednesday, Dec. 25th, 1861, camp near Swan's... "This is Christmas & and very dull Christmas it has been to me. Had an egg-nog to-night but did not enjoy it much as we had no ladies to share it with us."

* * * * *

One of the dreariest accounts of Christmas during the Civil War came from Lt. Col. Frederic Cavada, captured at Gettysburg and writing about Christmas 1863 in Libby Prison in Richmond: *"The north wind comes reeling in fitful gushes through the iron bars, and jingles a sleighbell in the prisoner's ear, and puffs in his pale face with a breath suggestively odorous of eggnog...." "...Christmas Day! A day which was made for smiles, not sighs - for laughter, not tears - for the hearth, not prison."*

* * * * *

From the diary of Robert Watson of Key West, Florida. *December 25, 1863 at Dalton, Georgia after action at Chickamauga "Christmas day and a very dull one but I find a tolerable good dinner. I had one drink of whiskey in the morning. There was some serenading last night but I took no part in it for I did not feel merry as my thoughts were of home..."*

* * * * *

From "Diary of An Enlisted Man" by Lawrence VanAlstyne, 2nd Lieutenant, 90th United States Colored Infantry December 24, 1863 *"As to-morrow is Christmas we went out and made such purchases of good things as our purses would allow, and these we turned over to George and Henry, for safe keeping and for cooking on the morrow."*

* * * * *

After a miserable Holiday, Levi McCormick wrote in a letter to his wife: *Dec 27th 1864 Camp 4th Del Vol 3 Brg 2 Dev 3 Corps*

Dear wife I will send you a few lines stating how we are I have bin down with the diarier for about a weak it has bin the most sevar that I hav ever ha but I feel better to day & I hav washed all of my cloaths & I borrowed some cloathes while

mine are drying I cant write you mutch this time but if I keep wel I will try and write you a interesting leter some of those days we hav got houses built up wonce more but Christmas was a very dul day hear we have not had it yet but the war news is good we have had a despatch from G Shairman he has done more than we could of asked of him I hope this will find you all wel Samey is not very wel he had a cold we hav bin very mutch exposed but I dont want to write about You can sea the reason why I hav not wrote I send my love to all from you ever true and loving Husban d Levi McCormick good bysend on your box

* * * * *

In a letter to his sister Anna Simpson, Tally Simpson wrote: "*December 25th*

My dear sister,

This is Christmas Day. The sun shines feeble through a thin cloud, the air is mild and pleasant, a gentle breeze is making music through the leaves of the lofty pines that stand near our bivouac. All is quiet and still and that very stillness recalls some sad and painful thoughts. The day, one year ago, how many thousand families, gay and joyous, celebrating Merry Christmas, drinking health to absent members of their family and sending upon the wings of love and affection long, deep, and sincere wishes for their safe return to the loving ones at home, but today are clad in the deepest mourning in memory to some lost and loved member of their circle..."

"When will this war end? Will another Christmas roll around and find us all wintering in camp? Oh! That peace may soon be restored to our young but dearly beloved country and that we may all meet again in happiness."

* * * * *

From the Civil War diary of General Josiah Gorgas - 1864: "*December 26th A despondent Christmas has just passed, yet people contrived to eat hearty and good Christmas dinners. The soldier unfortunately have not even meat, and have had none for several days. The Commissary General has singly failed in his duties; while there is plenty of food in Georgia there is none here. There is no sufficient excuse for this. The food must be brought here, and the means to so provided and organized.."*

* * * * *

Jasper Cockerham wrote the following letter to his niece his niece:

*Camp near Dinwiddie Court House
December 26, 1864*

Dear Martha,

Your letter came to hand a few days since and I am now seated to answer. I have but little news times is very dull out here yesterday was the most quiet day we have had for some time. The soldiers all look sad and lonely. We have nothing spiritual or refreshing in camp. Have not see one case of intoxicification during our Christmas holiday. All is calm on the lines in front of Petersburg and Richmond, except some little picket firing on Saturday night. I have a splendid cain and am living quite comfortable at present. Rations are rather scanty...

*Yours affectionatly,
Jasper*

* * * * *

James Holloway, writing from Dranesville, VA tells his family that same Christmas: "*You have no idea how lonesome I feel this day. It's the first time in my life I'm away from loved ones at home."*

* * * * *

Johnny Green, of the 4th Kentucky's Orphan Brigade, expressed this sentiment: *"Peace on Earth, Good will to men should prevail. We certainly would preserve the peace if they would go home and let us alone..."*

* * * * *

Christmas 1864: Many units were on the march, either trying to evade capture or pursuing the opponent for better position. Soldiers left in the squalid conditions of prison camps spent the day remembering holidays at home, as did others in slightly more comfortable settings. Confederate General Gordon, writing from his headquarters near Petersburg, wrote of fighting famine as well as General Grant:

"The one worn-out railroad running to the far South could not bring us half enough necessary supplies: and even if it could have transported Christmas boxes of good things, the people at home were too depleted to send them."

* * * * *

By late 1865 the country was starting to reunite as the horrors of war and the shock of Lincoln's assassination faded into memory. That December brought the first peacetime Christmas in five years. Most soldiers had been mustered out of the military and were home to celebrate the holiday with their families. Of course, many others had never returned home. Harper's published a poem titled "By the Christmas Hearth" that was more in line with the nation's hopeful spirit of reunification. The last stanza especially captures the cheerful holiday mood and eagerness of the American people to put the turbulent conflict behind them:

*Bring holly, rich with berries red,
And bring the sacred mistletoe;
Fill high each glass, and let hearts
With kindest feelings flow;
So sweet it seems at home once more
To sit with those we hold most dear,
And keep absence once again
To keep the Merry Christmas here.*

Sources

[A Drummer Boy's Diary](#) , ["Life in Camp"](#) by J.C. Williams, [Twenty-Second Voluntary Infantry, Ought It Not Be a Merry Christmas?](#), [Christmas At The Time Of The Civil War](#), [Civil War Diary of CSA General Josiah Gorgas, December 1864](#), [December 1864](#), [Civil War Times](#) by Kevin Rawlings , ["The Diary of an Enlisted Man"](#) by Lawrence Van Alstyne, ["A Life for the Confederacy"](#) (Diary of Pvt. Robert A. Moore)



Fredricksburg Letter, Christmas, 1862

Part of [Civil War @ Charleston Website](#)

Editor's note: This letter is excerpted from a book titled *Far, Far From Home*. a collection of letters of Dick and Tally Simpson, members of the 3rd South Carolina Volunteers. Tally writes from the trenches of Fredricksburg, where the Confederate Army, fighting under General's Lee, Longstreet & Jackson a few weeks earlier had halted a Federal advance towards Richmond by the Federal General Burnside's army in December of 1862. The Federal army occupied the town, but lost thousands of men in repeated assaults up the hillsides against the entrenched Confederates above. Both armies ended the battle in the positions where they began it and spent a frigid winter watching each other across the river. *Transcribed for the net by [Douglas M. Schauer](#), member 27th. S.C. Vol. Infantry Reenactors.*

From: Tally Simpson, Camp near Fredricksburg
To: Anna Simpson
Camp near Fred'burg
Dec 25th, 1862

My dear Sister

This is Christmas Day. The sun shines feebly through a thin cloud, the air is mild and pleasant, [and] a gentle breeze is making music through the leaves of the lofty pines that stand near our bivouac. All is quiet and still, and that very stillness recalls some sad and painful thoughts.

This day, one year ago, how many thousand families, gay and joyous, celebrating Merry Christmas, drinking health to absent members of their family, and sending upon the wings of love and affection long, deep, and sincere wishes for their safe return to the loving ones at home, but today are clad in the deepest mourning in memory to some lost and loved member of their circle. If all the dead (those killed since the war began) could be heaped in one pile and all the wounded be gathered together in one group, the pale faces of the dead and the groans of the wounded would send such a thrill of horror through the hearts of the originators of this war that their very souls would rack with such pain that they would prefer being dead and in torment than to stand before God with such terrible crimes blackening their characters. Add to this the cries and wailings of the mourners - mothers and fathers weeping for their sons, sisters for their brothers, wives for their husbands, and daughters for their fathers - [and] how deep would be the convictions of their consciences.

Yet they do not seem to think of the affliction and distress they are scattering broadcast over the land. When will this war end? Will another Christmas roll around and find us all wintering in camp? Oh! That peace may soon be restored to our young but dearly beloved country and that we may all meet again in happiness.

But enough of these sad thoughts, we went on picket in town a few days ago. The pickets of both armies occupy the same positions now as they did before the battle. Our regt was quartered in the market place while the others occupied stores and private houses. I have often read of sacked and pillaged towns in ancient history, but never, till I saw Fredricksburg, did I fully realize what one was. The houses, especially those on the river, are riddled with shell and ball. The stores have been broken open and deprived of every thing that was worth a shilling. Account books and notes and letters and papers both private and public were taken from their proper places and scattered over the streets and trampled under feet. Private property was ruined. Their soldiers would sleep in the mansions of the wealthy and use the articles and food in the house at their pleasure. Several houses were destroyed by fire. Such a wreck and ruin I never wish to see again.

Yet notwithstanding all this, the few citizens who are now in town seem to be cheerful and perfectly resigned. Such true patriots are seldom found. This will ever be a noted place in history.

While we were there, Brig Genl Patrick, U.S.A., with several of his aides-de-camp, came over under flag of truce. Papers were exchanged, and several of our men bought pipes, gloves, &c from the privates who rowed the boat across. They had plenty of liquor and laughed, drank, and conversed with our men as if they had been friends from boyhood.

There is nothing new going on. I am almost dead to hear from home. I have received no letters in nearly three weeks, and you can imagine how anxious I am. The mails are very irregular. I hope to get a letter soon. Dunlap Griffin is dead, died in Richmond of wounds received in the last battle. Capt Hance is doing very well. Frank Fleming is in bad condition. (He has been elected lieutenant since he left.)

Write to me quick right off. I wish to hear from you badly. Remember me to my friends and relatives, especially the Pickens and Ligons. Hoping to hear from you soon I remain

Your bud
Tally

Pres Hix came for the remains of Nap his brother and Johnnie Garlington yesterday and will take them to Richmond today. They will be carried on home immediately. Tell Aunt Caroline Jim is getting on finely. Howdy to all the negroes. I have received the bundle of clothes sent to Columbia. The bundle contained one shirt, one scarf, and two pairs of socks. At least I suppose it is the one you sent to Columbia to be sent to Barnwell at Richmond. I am a thousand times obliged. When is Harry coming? Oh! that peace may soon be restored to our young but dearly beloved country and that we may all meet again in happiness.



Scheduled Speakers for 2008 - 2009:

Sep 3, 2008: **NO MEETING**

Oct 1, 2008: Bill Sitman - "Revenue Cutters (Coast Guard)"

Nov 5, 2008: Jari Villanueva - "The Civil War Bugle"

Dec 3, 2008: BVCWRT Members - Discussion of selected topics, plus our Christmas Social

Jan 7, 2009: Dennis Kelly – The Army of Tennessee

Feb 4, 2009: Roger Arthur - "Lincoln's Legacy"

Mar 4, 2009: Chip Crowe - "Chickamauga: the Real Story"

Apr 1, 2009: Noah Andre Trudeau – “ Southern Storm”

May 6, 2009: To be announced

May --, 2009: Field Trip TBD

May 19, 2009: (Annual Banquet): **Speaker will be Mark Neely**, McCabe Greer Professor in the American Civil War Era at Penn State University has agreed to speak at our banquet. Professor Neely has authored and co-authored numerous books including the Pulitzer Prize-winning "The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties". Professor Neely's curricula Vitae is available at: http://history.psu.edu/faculty/curriculaVitae/Neely_M_CV.doc

Brandywine Valley Civil War Round Table Membership Application

Application Type: New Renewal

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Note: Monthly newsletters are distributed by E-mail only.

Membership Type: Individual (\$25) Family (\$40): Student (\$15):

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Bring the completed form and a check payable to BVCWRT to a meeting or mail it to:
Dave Walter, Treasurer, 937 Thorne Drive, West Chester, PA 19382