

"Beginning with the group that met in Chicago in 1940, the discussion groups we know as round tables have involved learning, good fellowship, and preservation focusing on the Civil War.

"The Civil War round tables have been in the forefront in enhancing our understanding and appreciation of the Civil War — the single most important experience that helped frame our national identity — and in maintaining the substance of this heritage."

— Edwin C. Bearss, Chief Historian Emeritus, National Park Service

The Civil War Round Table of the District of Columbia

It was a divisive and, of course, tragic conflict. It raged for four long and terrible years, and imparted untold suffering upon the land, the people ... and the nation.

Families were split asunder, brother against brother, father against son ... neighbors were divided ... friendships ripped apart and were lost forever.

Although the Civil War changed the face and course of America forever, the end of the conflict brought with it a rebirth of the nation. Healing brought with it strength.

Ever since Appomattox, historians, scholars, military tacticians, and just plain ol' people have been fascinated by the Civil War.

Its battles, its personalities, the heroism, the brutality, the strategy, the victories, the defeats. The leaders, the common soldiers, the politics, the triumphs and the tragedies.

All of these things have perpetuated a broad and continuing interest in this conflict, so much a part of us and our nation.

The Beginning: From a Log at 2nd Manassas...

In February 1935, four men sat on a log overlooking a snow-covered Second Manassas battlefield and came up with a way of sharing interests in the Civil War.

Their idea blossomed five years later in Chicago, when the first Civil War Round Table was formed by Carl Sandburg, Ralph Newman, and others.

The Civil War Round Table of the District of Columbia was formed in 1951.

Among its organizers were authors Bruce Catton, Virgil Carrington "Pat" Jones, Col. Robert Selph Henry, and Harold Peterson.

Mr. Catton was the featured speaker at the first meeting — his topic was "Mr. Lincoln's Army" — held at the old Washington Post building at 1515 L Street, NW.

For a while, meetings were held in the homes of members, but as the ranks grew, sessions were held at the Army & Navy Club.

When membership swelled to more than 500 during the Civil War Centennial in the mid- 1960s, dinner meetings were held in the ballroom of the National Press Club.

The CWRT of DC: What It Is, What It Does

The purpose of the Round Table, as stated in its constitution, is to further and to stimulate interest in the history of the United States, particularly that of the Civil War.

Among its other achievements, the CWRT of DC spawned the National Civil War Centennial Commission.

Round Table policy continues to support the preservation of Civil War historical sites and landmarks in the area surrounding the Nation's Capital.

The CWRT meets on the second Tuesday of each month, September through June, at the Officers' Club at Fort Lesley J. McNair, at 4th and P streets, in Southwest DC. Meetings begin at 6 p.m.

Meetings generally consist of a social hour followed by a dinner and a speaker. Topics cover a broad spectrum of Civil War interests, and speakers include noted Civil War authors and scholars.

The CWRT also sponsors field trips, tours and other events.

Members receive a monthly newsletter that includes book reviews, Civil War related articles, and information about the program for the next meeting.