

# The Sentinel



*The Roundtable at Perryville  
Kurt Holman, Perryville Battlefield Park Manager, points out the terrain*

## **Leading to Perryville: A Dark and Bloody Ground**

Michael Willever brought the story of his newly published book *A Dark and Bloody Ground: Sowing the Wind*, to the April meeting. It is too bad if you were not there because it was a great set-up for the first annual MCCWR road trip to Perryville, Kentucky, the following Saturday.

Michael is a passionate and engaging speaker, able to transmit his emotion and expertise to one of the largest Roundtable crowds in recent months. Having been a minister at one time in his life certainly allowed him to be comfortable speaking to a large group, and his lifelong enthusiasm for Civil War history made his talk especially engaging. With his co-author, Michael Phelps, and his wife and daughter along for moral and technical support, he held the group enthralled from beginning to end.

Two questions that were in some minds of those attending were quickly answered by Michael. The first was “Why Perryville?” The obvious answers were proximity of the battlefield to his home here in central Indiana and the greater interest in the western theater of the war that permeates the Midwest. But a big reason, he said, was simply because no one had done any significant work on Perryville for many, many

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## **Road trip to Perryville**

Michael Willever’s presentation about the days leading up to Perryville anticipated the first road trip of the MCCWR—a visit to the largest Civil War site in Kentucky, and one of the most pristine of the entire Western Theater of the war. At a little after noon on Saturday, April 17, thirteen intrepid Roundtable members gathered at the Visitors’ Center for Perryville State Battlefield, a division of the Kentucky parks system. This site has, fortunately, been spared much of the urban sprawl and commercial growth that has infringed on many of the more common names we know, such as Gettysburg, Chancellorsville, and Franklin.

The day was a bit cool and breezy but marvelously sunny. Park Superintendent Kurt Holman met the group at 12:30 and began what would be three-plus hours of detailed examination of the October 1864 battle and its legacy. The tour opened with the new film recently produced for the park and was shown in the newly renovated museum, a renovation produced and executed in large part by volunteers. The film was extremely well done and was hauntingly evocative of what must have been one of the bleakest days in the history of the Commonwealth of

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*Michael Willever autographs books after his presentation*

## **Leading to Perryville continued**

years. The bigger question, however, was why his new book turned to fiction, since some Civil War “buffs” look down on novels as not worthy of consideration. Michael cited one of the favorite books, Michael Shaara’s *The Killer Angels*, as an example of how historical fiction can be accurate, and at the same time enthralling. The accuracy comes from the extensive work by his co-author, Michael Phelps, in researching the topic. Michael’s enthusiasm “sealed the deal,” so to speak.

As noted on Michael’s website, [www.ADarkAndBloodyGround.com](http://www.ADarkAndBloodyGround.com), “the book chronicles the week of October 4-7, 1862, when the State of Kentucky lay in the balance as vast foraging armies swept the country side; soldiers from the North and from the South fighting and dying, staining Kentucky’s soil with their blood. The reader witnesses these events through the eyes of seven protagonists, four Southern and three Northern. This novel for the first time brings to life such historical figures as George Thomas, Leonidas Polk, Phil Sheridan and Patrick Cleburne, to name a few. The events of this week changed the lives of these men and the State of Kentucky forever!”

Recounting the story of the book would be far too detailed and time consuming for this space, so let’s look at Michael’s presentation the same way he presents his narrative, by highlighting the leading participants:

- Josiah Stoddard Johnston, a “Kentucky Dreamer” who desperately wanted to draw Kentucky into the war and align it with the Confederacy.
- George Thomas, a native Virginian, who remained loyal to the Union and became the “Rock of Chickamauga” in 1864. He would be offered the overall command of Union forces just before the battle, but would turn it down due to his inexperience with the area and the situation.
- Fighting Joe Wheeler, CSA, who commanded a brigade at Perryville and would become one of the few Confederate officers buried in Arlington National Cemetery because of his service in the Spanish-American War years later.
- Leonidas Polk, a West Point Graduate and roommate of Jefferson Davis there who had abandoned the military for a life as an Episcopal Bishop but was drawn back in by Davis

after 1861. Polk would die in battle at Kennesaw Mountain later in the war.

- William H. Lytle, a Union brigade commander who wavered but held against the onslaught of the attack of both Bushrod Johnson’s and Patrick Cleburne’s brigades during the battle.
- Phil Sheridan, later to be Grant’s brilliant cavalry commander, in his first serious fight.
- Patrick Cleburne, the now almost legendary CSA general, wounded in the face a few days in advance of Perryville. He would play a pivotal role in the battle and later in the war, leading to his death at Franklin in November of 1864. Cleburne would most likely have risen higher in the CSA military aristocracy but for his early recognition of the need to enlist black troops to offset the superior numbers of the North.

These principal characters combine with the two commanding officers, Braxton Bragg for the CSA and Don Carlos Buell for the Union, to weave a complicated story of Confederate tactical victory—only to be lost to the Union’s strategic triumph because of superior numbers.

Don’t let “fiction” put you off. Michael’s novel takes accurate historical information and adds flesh to the wartime figures we have all have known throughout our lives. Go to the website, read the comments, look at the pictures and maps and you will see why this was a fascinating evening that warrants a consideration of Michael’s book, which will make you anticipate his sequel coming in the fall, *A Dark and Bloody Ground: Reaping the Whirlwind*. If you liked *The Killer Angels*, you should give this book a chance.



*Michael Willever chats with Roundtable members after the meeting*

## **Next Meeting**

It was, in James M. McPherson’s words, a campaign “scripted in never, never land.” Now in charge of the Confederate Army of Tennessee, General J. B. Hood, planned to lure Sherman away from Atlanta by marching North in November 1864.

At our next meeting, visiting historian David Fraley tells us about this move and the disasterous events that followed at Franklin, Nashville and beyond.

## 2010 Encampment Date Set

The date for the Fourth Annual Civil War Encampment has been set for Saturday and Sunday, July 31–August 1, on the lawn of the Monroe County History Center, 202 E. 6<sup>th</sup> St. in Bloomington. With the unfortunate exception of the washout caused by the statewide June flooding two years ago, this has been a very successful living history event co-sponsored annually by your Roundtable and its parent organization, the Monroe County Historical Society. This year's event will again feature the 35<sup>th</sup> Irish, the same group who participated last year with great success. You can see medical and cooking demonstrations, musket firings, Civil War music and games and more all day long. Watch for more information down the road on the Roundtable website or on the History Center website, [www.monroehistory.org](http://www.monroehistory.org).

## New Permanent Exhibit at History Center

Jamee Wissink, the volunteer curator of exhibits at the Monroe County History Center, proposes installing a permanent Civil War exhibit in the museum gallery and has asked for the Roundtable's help. This exhibit would relate, as much as possible, to items connected with Monroe County or South Central Indiana. Certainly one of the stars of the show would be Big Dave van Buskirk, but the Center needs more. The space would be limited to a long wall between two of the main galleries and thus would be mostly two-dimensional. Jamee needs items that would work well being shown under glass, such as documents, photos, and letters.

A few three-dimensional items may be incorporated, too, such as swords, buttons, epaulets, etc., but they would be protected under Plexiglas. Most documents will be reproduced through scanning and photography, so no one would have to permanently give up a family heirloom, discharge paper, letter, and so on, to participate. If you have any item you think would be appropriate, contact any officer of the Roundtable and he or she will discuss donation or loan procedures with you. This is a great opportunity to get your own history on display

## Books, Books . . .

*THINGS UNSEEN*, A NOVEL BY ROUNDTABLE MEMBER DEBORAH K. CRONIN, WAS RECENTLY PUBLISHED. The book is a celebration of all things good about small town life and faithful dogs, including the pastor's whimsical canine companion, Starbucks. All profits from the sale of this book go to Paws & Think, Inc., the Indiana service dog organization that helped Deborah train her hearing assist dog, Babe. The price is \$19.95, including shipping and handling. You can order directly from: Paws & Think, Inc., 415 W. 46<sup>th</sup> St., Indianapolis, IN 46208. To find out more about this charitable organization, go to <http://pawsandthink.org/>.

*13 DAYS AT ANDERSONVILLE: THE TRIAL OF THE RAIDERS* BY PHILLIP J. TICHENOR. The just published novel is a fictionalized account of a real event at the notorious Andersonville Prison in 1864. A group known as the "Raiders" terrorized the camp, stealing food, tents, and valuables. Working together, camp guards and prisoners captured the men and put them on trial before a court of Union non-commissioned officers.

## Road Trip Continued from page 1

means to explain in his own words what happened that fall day almost a century and a half ago, and explain he did in amazing detail.

Next up was the tour of the battlefield itself. A short trek took the group past the Confederate mass grave cemetery and to an obelisk honoring Union troops. Then over the fields of battle up to Parson's Ridge where a Union Battery first encountered the Confederates coming in from the east and north. The walk continued to Starkweather Hill and on to the south past several Union batteries.

The battle details are too complicated to summarize in a newsletter. Suffice it to say that 18,000 Confederates faced 40,000 Union troops and, in the end, won a short-term victory one day, only on the next elect to leave the state rather than stay and face a vastly unequal force. This engagement was the Confederacy's last, best hope to secure Kentucky for the South and, at least in Commander Braxton Bragg's mind, it had failed. Was this decision critical to the ultimate outcome of the war? Remember Lincoln's only half-humorous assessment of the importance of this border state—"I would like to have God on my side, but I *must* have Kentucky."

The visitors also had cause to appreciate the struggles that Park manager Holman has had in maintaining his battlefield. While much of the area has been secured and preserved, there are some pockets that still are threatened—some of significance. As he told the group, there are places where it would be the same as owning everything surrounding it, but not having the Angle at Gettysburg. Field guns for display can now run \$30,000, so Kurt created a one-inch thick wooden canon to crown a ridge a quarter-mile away—and no one noticed! Fence rails cost \$5.00 each—not much until you consider the hundreds that are needed. That is why, he told the group, "our fences are not quite as tall as the genuine 1862 versions—more bang (read: length) for the buck!" The challenges continue, but this dedicated enthusiast—who just happens to be a state employee—will see it through.

In the end, the first Roundtable road trip was a resounding success, with members enjoying the tour and then going off in varying directions, with some having dinner at the historic Bardstown hostelry, the Beaumont Inn, in Harrodsburg. Those who stayed over the next day enjoyed a stop at the Museum of the Western Theater of the Civil War in Bardstown on the way home.

Who knows — next year, Gettysburg?

## Underground Railroad in Bloomington?

On May 20, at 7:00 p.m., Jeanne R. Regan-Dinius, Director of Special Initiatives at the Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, will discuss the Underground Railroad Initiative that fosters research, identification and protection efforts for Indiana's Underground Railroad resources.

The goal is to identify the sites, people and events associated with Underground Railroad activity in Indiana. Explore the web of potential paths that the Underground Railroad might have taken through Monroe County in the Roundtable's usual meeting room — part of the Third Thursday program series on topics of especially strong interest to the local community.

# New Casino Proposed at Gettysburg

Even though Civil War enthusiasts and lovers of the Gettysburg battlefield won a victory in 2006 when a proposed gambling casino northeast of the tiny Pennsylvania town was defeated. The same businessman has now resurrected the idea and is heading a coalition of interested parties to once again obtain the only remaining gambling license in Pennsylvania for a site just one-half mile south of the battlefield boundary.

If licensed, the casino would be incorporated into the existing Eisenhower Resort and Conference Center. The site is also within the historically sensitive study area of the battlefield, as defined by the American Battlefield Protection Program (an arm of the National Park Service). Not only is this proposal significantly closer to the park than the 2006 casino plan, it also lies along the Emmitsburg Road, at the heart of the Journey Through Hallowed Ground National Scenic Byway (created in October 2009) and Journey Through Hallowed Ground National Heritage Area. Such designations are not undertaken lightly and reinforce the concept that this region is of tremendous historic significance. There is a duty to safeguard it for future generations.

Four major preservation organizations are involved in fighting the casino. If you want more information go to:

The Civil War Preservation Trust

[www.civilwar.org](http://www.civilwar.org)

The National Parks Conservation Association

[www.npca.org](http://www.npca.org)

The National Trust for Historic Preservation

[www.preservationnation.org](http://www.preservationnation.org)

The Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Association

[www.preservationpa.org](http://www.preservationpa.org)



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