Maps, Mapping and Mapmakers of the Civil War

We welcomed a new speaker to the podium this month, our own Lou Malcomb. Lou served as a librarian for the Indiana University Bloomington Libraries for 39 years, as Head of Undergraduate Library Services and Head of Government Information, Maps, and Microforms Librarian for the Geosciences. She is best known for her expertise with state and federal government information. While her interest in the Civil War is relatively new, Lou has been active in the restoration and preservation of historic cemeteries through her work with the Monroe County History Center’s Cemetery Committee for some time now. She is also an active member of the Indiana Barn Foundation, the Government Documents Roundtable, and the Association of Gravestone Studies.

Lou admits to being a novice to the study of Civil War maps, but her background has allowed her to put together a very different program than we have had in a while. And we want to encourage anyone who has an interest or some expertise in a related area to do a little research and make a presentation to the group. Sometimes the work to get something together is the most fun of all.

While most of us may realize that maps are important for the success of any campaign in any war, it may not be readily obvious just how important they are. Generals relied on them constantly. This is obvious when you think about the fact that Robert E. Lee, for instance, was himself a mapmaker. As an engineering graduate of West Point, Lee knew maps, knew how to make them and knew how to use them. This is true of most of the successful leaders of the war. So where are the maps that Lee relied on?

One source Lou mentioned was Maps and Mapmakers of the Civil War by Earl McElfresh. This is an excellent source of many of the maps used in or after the war and has a good section on the biographical information of many of the most notable mapmakers. But Lou cautioned that the one drawback of this book was its size. It could probably be described best as a small coffee-table book, and this makes many of the detailed and, in many cases beautiful, maps very hard to see. But, as she pointed out as well, many of these maps were very large originally, as big as four feet by twenty feet, so no reproduction will do them justice and looking at the originals when possible is crucial to truly appreciate them.

Another good source for her was Mapping for Stonewall: The Civil War Service of Jed Hotchkiss by William Miller. Jedediah Hotchkiss (although he preferred Jed), was a pre-war educator and geologist. He was born in New York but moved to the Shenandoah Valley in his early adult years and became increasingly attached to that part of Virginia. When the war began, he chose to side with his adopted South and soon caught the attention of Stonewall Jackson, who needed some good maps. Hotchkiss (at right) responded and provided Jackson with maps that gave the general the representational information he needed to visualize and grasp terrain and topography. Their relationship was sealed and Hotchkiss was on Jackson’s staff until Stonewall’s untimely death at Chancellorsville in May of 1863. He continued to serve under other generals like Jubal Early and Richard Ewell until the end of the war. His map collection is today considered one of the most outstanding of the 19th century. This small section of his map of the second day at Gettysburg highlights his unique use of “quotation marks” or slashes to represent terrain changes, unlike the topographic elevation contour lines we are used to today.

There were other significant mapmakers, many of whom would be familiar for other reasons. George Armstrong Custer, not known for his scholarly prowess at West Point, was nonetheless adept at mapmaking. This was one reason for his meteoric rise in the Union Army. Author Ambrose Bierce was discovered to have a knack for topographical engineering which led to a small but important role on the staffs of both William Rosecrans and George Thomas. Washington Roebling was good at mapmaking in the war, but we know him more today as the builder of the iconic Brooklyn Bridge in the 1870s. And Gouverneur K. Warren, the Hero of Little Round Top, was a prominent mapper.

Maps were critical to the war effort. Perhaps Earl McElfresh sums it up best: “The military maps of the Civil War itemized in very down-to-earth detail the American landscape over which the armies of the Blue and Gray marched and fought for four long years...The maps leave behind a precise and intimate portrait of a nation as it was at perhaps the most significant time of its history. In some places, the Civil War maps remained the best available well into the twentieth century.”

This only scratches the surface of Lou’s excellent program. A DVD is available if you did not get to see it. But the best way to understand a map...go out and look at one!
Join Us in April
A Change to the April Program!!

We have had a change with the April program. Our scheduled Wiley Lecturer, Eric Wittenberg, had an unavoidable schedule conflict and will now be presenting this season’s Wiley Lecture on May 10, 2016. That program will discuss Ulric Dahlgren and the infamous Dahlgren Raid.

As a substitute for April’s originally scheduled program, we have put together something to commemorate the Battle of Shiloh (which took place April 6-7, 1862). The program will consist of a brief summary of the battle followed by a video that discusses an investigation of, and some theories on, why the South lost the advantage it had initially gained during the battle. After the video, we will have a brief discussion period as time allows.

So please join us Tuesday, April 12th at 7 PM at the Monroe County History Center for our program entitled: Shiloh Revisited.

Looking Ahead
May 10 – Join us as we welcome our 2015-16 Wiley Lecturer (a bit late due to our original speaker becoming ill in September). Our guest will be Eric Wittenberg who will tell us about “Ulrich Dahlgren and the Dahlgren Raid”.

June 14 – Our speaker will be Shelby Harriel from Pearl River Community College in Poplarville, Mississippi, who will speak on “Forbidden, Hidden, and Forgotten: Women Soldiers of the Civil War.”

In Memoriam

It is with a great degree of sadness that we learned of the recent loss of one of our own. James Stevenson, the father of our Hospitality Chair, Randy Stevenson, passed away last week. We will miss him in the front row as we move forward. He always claimed he could hear better there, but we knew it was really because he was so keenly interested in every program. Our thoughts go out to Randy and his family in this difficult time for them.

***Quote of the Month***

On March 26, 1862, Stonewall Jackson summoned Jedediah Hotchkiss to his headquarters and directed him to “make me a map of the Valley, from Harper's Ferry to Lexington, showing all the points of offence and defence [sic] in those places.” This simple command changed Hotchkiss’ life. From that day forward, he was no longer an educator or a geologist as he had once been...he was now a mapmaker.
A Map of Chickamauga
The map above, by Walter J. Morris, shows the positions of the Confederate and Federal armies on the 19th of September, 1863. It is plate #47 in the Military Atlas of the Civil War. It is impossible to appreciate the detail of any of these maps in this small depiction.

A portion of Hazard's railroad map of the South showing the scarcity of rail lines there as compared to the North.

Sheridan's Map of the Upper Potomac
A contributor to this map was David Hunter Strother, born in western Virginia but schooled in the North and Europe. When war came, he chose to stay with the Union as opposed to the land of his birth. He rose to the rank of Lt. Col. And was on McClellan’s staff at Antietam. This is plate #69 in the Military Atlas of the Civil War.
Capt. Ephraim Waterman Wiley, Co. H, 8th Maine Inf.—Grandfather of former MCCWR President David Wiley. Present or active at Port Royal, Fort Pulaski, Drewery’s Bluff, Cold Harbor, Chaffin’s Farm, Deep Bottom, Spring Hill, White Oak Road, Fort Gregg, Fort Baldwin, Petersburg and Appomattox.


Col. James McMannomy, Commander, 63rd Indiana Volunteer Inf.- Ancestor of MCCWR member Matt Hoagland. Second Manassas, fought Morgan’s Raiders at Shepherdsville, Kentucky.

Pvt. William Nicholas Shiflet, Co. I, 10th Alabama Infantry—2nd Great Grand Uncle to Kevin Shiflet, MCCWR member. Engaged, to some degree, at Dranesville, Yorktown, Williamsburg, Seven Pines, Gaines Mill, Frazier’s Farm, Second Manassas, Harpers Ferry, Sharpsburg, Hazel River, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Second Cold Harbor, Petersburg, High Bridge, Farmville and Appomattox. Pvt. Shiflet is only one of a total of seventeen of Kevin’s ancestors who served the Confederacy, including thirteen cousins, two third great granduncles and two second great granduncles.

Jacob Mann, Co. A, 16th Iowa Inf.—Ancestor of Allan Sather, MCCWR member. Fought at Resaca, Adairsville, New Hope Church, Kennesaw Mountain, Peachtree Creek, and Bald Hill (Atlanta) where he was captured and sent to Andersonville Prison.


Pvt. Luther Oviatt, Pennsylvania 14th Cavalry, Co. I- Gr-Gr-Gr Uncle of Mary Pat Livingston, member MCCWR. Harper's Ferry, Monocacy Bridge protection of B&O RR. Died at Hammond Hospital, Point Lookout while on duty. Buried Arlington Cemetery.


Cpl. James Dickson- 10th Wisconsin Infantry, Co. D; 3rd great grandfather of MCCWR member Scott Schroeder. His only real engagement was at the Battle of Perryville where he was killed in action.


Cpl. Graham Wilson—4th Virginia Cavalry—Great-great-grandfather of member Steve Rolfe. Born and raised in westernmost VA (today WV) across the Ohio River from KY, Wilson survived the war and is buried today in Louisa, KY.

The MCCWR is proud to be an arm of the Monroe County History Center, 202 E. 6th St. Bloomington, IN 47408, 812-332-2517. We meet on the second Tuesday of each month, September thru June, at 7 pm. Meetings are always free and open to the public.

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