

## Bill Overlease

1925-2007

### We Have Lost a Friend

What a sad duty it is to report that one of our most loyal and active members passed away unexpectedly on the last day of November. Bill Overlease was a three time program presenter at the roundtable, an enthusiastic Civil War buff for most of his 82 years and one of the most optimistic people we have seen in our midst. He will be deeply missed.

Bill was a native of Elkhart, Indiana, and a U.S. Navy veteran who served in the Pacific Theater in World War II. He graduated from Michigan State University in 1950 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry, Phi Kappa Phi and a Masters of Science in Conversation in 1952. He went on to receive a PhD in Botany and Plant Pathology in 1964. He worked as a naturalist in the Indiana State Parks for years where he met his future wife of 52 years, Edith Dymond. From 1963-1986 Bill was a professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania, specializing in ecology and field biology. He was honored to be selected as a Professor Emeritus of West Chester University.

In the course of his career, Bill authored numerous articles and publications on the study of vegetation and birds. Along with Edith, he most recently published *Daylight in the Swamp*, an oral history of logging in northwestern Michigan (1996) and *100 Years of Change in the Distribution of Common Indiana Weeds* (2007). He and Edith loved traveling, having visited all seven continents. They spent their summers in Benzie County, Michigan. As Edith said recently, they “simply went everywhere together.” Bill leaves behind his wife, Edith, and a daughter, Mary Schubert, of Ithaca, New York.



Bill and Edith at Lake Tahoe on a recent vacation

But that is all the narrative of a life mostly lived before we knew him as a fellow Civil War buff. What we of the roundtable will remember most are the lively presentations Bill gave us. In April, 2005, Bill presented us with interesting examples of both Civil War cemeteries and Civil War song lyrics he had studied, along with how they changed as the War continued. In April of 2006, Bill artfully held his audience spellbound with the story of and readings from *John Brown's Body*, the epic prose-poem written by Stephen Vincent Benet in the 1920's. And, how ironic it now seems, Bill was our presenter just last month, telling the roundtable about General Henry Carrington, the desk General who ran the Hoosier war effort in the Great Rebellion. The outstanding constant in all of Bill's programs was not the content, although it was all thorough and well researched, nor the style, which was consistently laid-back yet scholarly. What will be most remembered is his passion for his topics, for the both the study of the war and his deep and apparent desire to share this knowledge with others. As said before...Bill will be missed.

The officers of the roundtable want to memorialize Bill by establishing a Bill Overlease Fund. This fund will be used to further the work of the roundtable in any way it can. The first benefit proposed was to fund the purchase of supplies and construction of a small lending library case dedicated in Bill's name which will be used to house the books, magazines, recordings, etc. that will be collected and kept at the History Center for members to scan and take advantage of during meetings. Another idea for the fund in the future was to provide travel money and honoraria for an annual guest speaker. Other ideas and comments are welcome. The fund has already gathered more than \$150. Contact any officer to contribute.

To close, let us remember Bill Overlease with two verses from a Civil War era poem, *Our Soldier Cousin*, by Arlouine:

Glide, river, gently to the sea;  
Sing dirges low and tender;  
Bear partings oft breathed near to thee,  
By patriot truth-defenders;  
Waft soothing murmurs from thy shores,  
To hearts so fondly loving;  
One sigh for us, who, more and more,  
Grieve for a soldier cousin.

There's cheer in this, too, mourning ones,  
We know our Christian cousin,  
When ranked with freedom's noble sons,  
Was bannered sure for heaven.  
Then weep no more; press back the tears,  
Save for the fond hearts riven,  
Who mourns their dead mid hope and fear,  
But "at home" is our soldier cousin.

## New Book for Researchers Out

We have received word in the last few days of a new book out that will be a boon for researchers. It is *Ship Island, Mississippi: Rosters and History of the Civil War Prison*. This work, while covering the entire history of the island from 1699 to the present, focuses on its use as a Federal prison camp during the Civil War.

Its rosters include details on each man imprisoned including soldiers from Indiana and other Northern states, and most Confederate states, as well. It is in hardcover, 479 pages, and sells for \$75. The book is available from such usual sources as Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble, as well as directly from the publisher by calling 1-800-253-2187.

## Encampment to Return in 2008

The encampment by members of the member Joel Foust's Union re-enactment regiment that was a big hit on the lawn of the Monroe County History Center last June is set to return in early June of next summer.

If you would like to help with this event, or simply want to remember to see it this time, be sure to mark your calendar. Specific dates will be announced later, but the plans are moving ahead. This event drew several hundred in 2007, from the knowledgeable to the "what the heck is this all about?" passers-by. If you are interested in perhaps becoming a re-enactor, contact Joel through one of the officers listed below.

## Kentucky Civil War Tour Planned

Another planned event for next year is to take a two day, one night tour of Civil War sites in the neighboring Commonwealth of Kentucky. One day would include a guided tour of the Perryville Battlefield while the other would travel to nearby Nancy Kentucky to visit the Mill Springs (aka Fishers' Creek) Battlefield, museum and national cemetery. Look for more definite information in future newsletters.

## Scenes from the Christmas Dinner!



*Lining up for food*



*Good talk after the repast*



*Carol Wise shows the layers her Civil War era dress*

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