



**CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF
FREDERICKSBURG, INC.
HARDTACK**

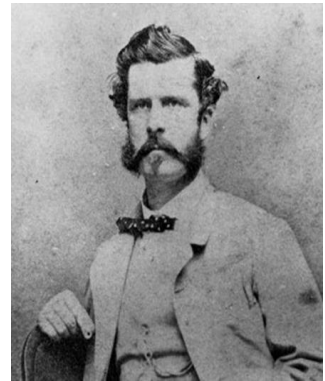


MARCH 2025 NEWSLETTER

March 26, 2025 Meeting

**PROGRAM: AN OFFICER OF SIX NAVIES: THE “HARD MESSY
UNEASY LIFE” OF COMMANDER HUNTER DAVIDSON**

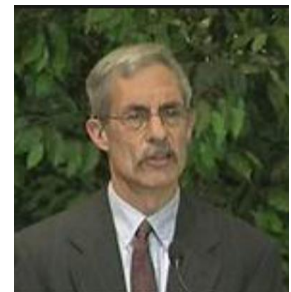
Hunter Davidson (1826-1913) may be the most accomplished Civil War naval officer of whom you’ve never heard. He entered the U.S. Navy in 1841 and enjoyed a distinguished 20-year career in blue before resigning in 1861 to join the Virginia State Navy. Commander of a gun section on the *CSS Virginia (Merrimac)* at the Battle of Hampton Roads, Davidson succeeded Spotsylvania’s own Cdr. Matthew Fontaine Maury in charge of the Confederacy’s Submarine Battery Service. After the war, he served with the Chilean Navy, was captain of the Maryland State Oyster Police, and commanded the Argentine Navy’s torpedo and hydrographic department before retiring to Paraguay. Davidson’s historical reputation rests primarily on his role as a pioneer of electrical “torpedoes” (mines).



How did a promising and intelligent young naval officer hailed as “a mechanical genius” for his invention of a life-saving apparatus in the spring of 1861 become “notorious” to his old service by 1864? Why did Davidson spend the last 45 years of his life as a self-described “hard up Confed” who marketed his talents to foreign governments and abandoned both his family and his country? And what can we learn from his self-described “hard messy uneasy life” about the careers of other former Confederate naval officers?

SPEAKER: DR. JOHN M. COSKI

Dr. John M. Coski retired after 33 years as historian and director of library, research, and publications at The Museum of the Confederacy and its successor, the American Civil War Museum. He is the author of *Capital Navy: The Men, Ships, and Operations of the James River Squadron* (Savas, 1996), *The Confederate Battle Flag: America’s Most Embattled Emblem* (Harvard University Press, 2005), and is working on a biography of Hunter Davidson, CSN. He received the 2019 Emerging Civil War Award for Service in Civil War Public History.



A special thanks to Kent and Teri Cushman for their sponsorship of this month's program. Please consider sponsoring a program for \$250. It's a great way to support our Round Table.



The February meeting was very informative as Dr. Zachery Fry discussed the political dynamics of the Civil War. Drawing from his book, *A Republic in the Ranks: Loyalty and Dissent in the Army of the Potomac*, Fry presented a superb analysis of the competing political parties vying to control the narrative during America's most difficult time. Focusing his discussion on the period immediately following the Battle of Fredericksburg, Fry documented how the attitude of the common soldier shifted from support of the McClellan-Democrats to the Republican administration's plan to prosecute the war. One of the most interesting points was his analysis of the Unit Resolutions, where numerous units documented their support for the Lincoln administration and submitted them to hometown newspapers. His talk resulted in a much clearer understanding of the political climate during the war.

UPCOMING PRESENTATIONS

The Civil War Round Table of Fredericksburg, Inc.

April 23, 2025 The Battle for Bristoe Station
Speaker: Kevin Pawlak

May 26, 2025 The Grand Old Man of the Army: General Winfield Scott's
Unionism and the Secession Crisis
Speaker: Barton Myers

For a complete list of presentations see: <http://www.cwrta.org/Program-Year-2024-2025>

The Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table

March 10, 2025 The Key/Sickles Affair
Speaker: Jim Hessler

April 14, 2025 Galvanized Confederates
Speaker: Glen Swain

For other lectures, meetings, and other civil war events please see our website calendar, <http://www.cwrta.org/view-calendar>.

Heritage Award

Please consider nominating a candidate for the Heritage Award. The award recognizes the outstanding contributions of individuals and organizations for their work in the preservation of local Civil War era buildings, objects, battlefields and history.

Categories:

- Teacher - To an outstanding teacher of middle or high school history in the Fredericksburg, Virginia area.
- Organization - To a local historical organization that has made an outstanding contribution to the preservation and interpretation of the area's Civil War history.
- Individual - To an individual in recognition of outstanding verbal, archival, or media interpretation work, for an outstanding paper, publication, or research project contributing to the knowledge of Virginia in the Civil War era.

Recent recipients include the Ladies Memorial Association, Friends of Wilderness Battlefield, Central Virginia Battlefield Trust, John Hennessy, Jane Conner, John Grant Griffiths, and Beth Daly.

Please complete the information below and deliver it to one of the Board Members at the March meeting. The nominations collected will then be submitted to the Heritage Award Chairman, Basil Moncrief.

Person submitting application:

Name: _____

Contact information of person submitting the application:

Email: _____

Phone: _____

I submit the following information for consideration for the Civil War Round Table of Fredericksburg, Inc. Heritage Award.

Name of candidate for the Award: _____

Is the candidate a

Teacher _____ Organization _____ Individual _____

Please explain in one or two pages why this person or organization should be considered for the Heritage Award. Describe your candidate's contributions to teaching, interpretation, preservation and or research (see descriptions above) involving Civil War preservation. Also, please include contact information for the candidate including phone number, email, and physical address.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK
March 2025

Good afternoon, CWRT Members,

I am very pleased to announce that the CWRT of Fredericksburg continues to increase its membership. As of this writing, I believe we have 106 paid members, and we are hopeful that we will have at least 110 paid members by the end of this month.

I want to express my sincere thanks to Mr. George Fenton, our Treasurer, for the great job he has done in creating and procuring the new CWRT of Fredericksburg membership pins. This project was long overdue and George took this requirement for action and, in my opinion, did a fantastic job in the design and size of our new membership pin. Thank you, George, for a job well done.

This month we will have our silent auction in conjunction with our dinner/presentation on the 26th of March. To date, we have collected a number of unique items that will be on display at the Dinner/Presentation. Items range from authentic Civil War memorabilia, framed prints, gift baskets, crystal decanters, and many more items of value and beauty. Please come early on the afternoon of the 26th, so that you will have time to examine these great items prior to the auction. We will be able to take cash, checks, or credit cards that evening.

As with every letter "From the President's Desk," I will remind our members to please contact Ms. Elizabeth Daly to make your dinner reservations no later than noon, on Monday, the 24th of March, so that Beth has an accurate count for the catering service at MWU. Beth may be contacted by email at: elizabethdaly@juno.com, or by her cell phone: **540-729-0260**. The CWRT of Fredericksburg has enjoyed a steady number of diners and their guests, averaging more than 74 people at dinner, since November 2024. We hope this number will be equaled and increased with our remaining four meetings until the summer break.

Thank you for your continued support of the Round Table, and I asked you to please bring a guest, or two, to our March dinner/presentation and Silent Auction.

I'll look forward to seeing you there.

Sincerely,
Bruce H. "Doc" Norton – President CWRT of Fredericksburg

MEETINGS & RESERVATIONS

Meetings are held at the Jepson Alumni Executive Center, University of Mary Washington, 1119 Hanover St., Fredericksburg, VA. Cocktails start at 5:30 pm, dinner at 6:30 pm, and presentations at 7:30 pm. Please make your reservations by calling (540) 729-0260, emailing elizabethdaly@juno.com, or visiting our website at www.cwrt.org. If you must cancel, please do so by noon of the Monday prior to the meeting. Otherwise, you will be responsible for payment.

MEMBERSHIP MINUTE

Your faithful columnist is in the Pacific Northwest this week so what follows is an abbreviated column.

Those of you taking note of Mardi Gras (as we are now into the Lenten season) might be interested in Navel Historian Neil Chatelain's piece in the Emerging Civil War: <https://emergingcivilwar.com/2025/03/04/civil-war-era-themes-in-mardi-gras-celebrations-1880-1940/>

This month my thoughts turn to the budget battles over federal agencies and the National Park Service.

In my humble opinion, the role of public historians and public history itself is both undervalued and under appreciated by the American public. Those young scholars seeking careers in this field have few prospects for work. Our beloved National Park Service is one of the few places young historians can find meaningful and productive work. Young historians not wishing to pursue academic careers have few choices. At what point will young, aspiring historians of all stripes conclude there is no paid work for their efforts and decide to pursue other careers? I wonder out loud what impact cutting NPS budgets will have on the task of contributing to the historic literacy of the America people.

Will state and local governments across the land be able to absorb the burden of supporting the never-ending effort to both preserve and interpret history? I sincerely doubt it. Public historians, I believe, come into this profession seeking a higher calling. As pointed out in a recent post in the Emerging Civil War (ECW) by the venerable Chis Mackowski, he notes:

“Many of us were mentored by legendary Park Service historians like Greg Mertz, Frank O’Reilly and John Hennessy. ECW’s connections with the Park

Service ran deep. Over our 13-year history, those connections have continued. Look through our alumni roll and you'll see a cavalcade of historians who worked not only at FredSpot but at other parks, as well—places like Gettysburg, Chickamauga/Chattanooga, Antietam, Harpers Ferry, Richmond and Petersburg -- including James Garfield.”

Chris goes on to cite the “spare time” (adding in uncompensated) research contributions to ECW by this cadre that results in rich, insightful, thought-provoking, and preservation material for the ECW. More to the point, the historical literacy efforts by those who worked or still work with the NPS and all the Civil War sites across the land are a national treasure and should be cherished by the American public. Moreover, preserving our nation’s history should be among the top responsibilities of our government. How many of us have visited historical sites with few interpretation resources, including no one answering our questions, leaving us longing for more information? In addition, as Mackowski so eloquently puts it: “Nothing beats the power of place.” To walk in the footsteps of soldiers on the battlefield supported by interpretation programs, led by public historians who are experts, brings a sublime understanding of the battles and the lives of those that fought.

Chris goes on in this vein (on National Park history sites):

“Those sites need regular maintenance and upkeep. They need stewardship and interpretation. ... (t)hese aren’t faceless bureaucrats (NPS staff). They’re the people who tell great stories, who kindle excitement in young visitors, who remind us that ‘some field’ isn’t just some field but a place of sacrifice and struggle where men fought, suffered, and died.”

The CWRT has a role to play in this future. In the past we have sponsored interns at the Fredericksburg National Battlefield and will likely do so again in the future. But there is more we can do to give voice to the preservation of public history and remember those who fought and died on Civil War battlefields.

I would be interested in your views. **What are your suggestions to aid in the preservation of Civil War history?** How might the CWRTF contribute to preserving public history efforts? Many of you are volunteers at sites in the area and many more support non-profit organizations such as the CVBT, the American Battlefield Trust, as well as Fredericksburg Area Museum, among others. Hit me up with your ideas at historyCWRTF@gmail.com.

In other news the CWRTF will be represented at the Northern Virginia Relic Hunters Association’s annual Civil War Show held 9-10 May. Please stop by our recruiting table and say hi!

Rack cards will continue to be available at the entranceway to the dining room. Please feel free to pick some up and pass along to friends, neighbors, colleagues, and others who may be interested in Civil War history. The best recruitment tool we have is you--our members--

reaching out to acquaintances/neighbors/friends. A rack card slipped into the hand of a guest, along with an invitation to join from a member, is better than paid advertisements.

Until next month, *may love of country lead you.*

David Hamon, Membership Chair

Write to:
historyCWRTF@gmail.com

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-- CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF FREDERICKSBURG, INC.--

Membership Application

Name: _____
Street Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____
Home/Cell Phone Number: _____
Email: _____
Occupation: _____
Areas of Civil War Interests: _____
Other Civil War Round Table Memberships: _____

Membership Categories:

Individual	\$ 60.00	\$ _____
Individual (dual Round Table Member):	\$ 50.00	\$ _____
Family (all persons of the same household):	\$110.00	\$ _____
Family (dual Round Table Member):	\$100.00	\$ _____
Sponsoring Member:	\$120.00	
Student/NMPS Intern:	No Charge	\$ _____
	Total Enclosed:	\$ _____

Consider a Donation to be the Sponsor of a Guest Speaker for \$250.00