

BENTONVILLE SYMPOSIUM AND BATTLEFIELD TOUR

SEPTEMBER 14-15, 2013 (by Mike Powell BCWRT member)

This weekend **THE FRIENDS OF BENTONVILLE BATTLEFIELD** sponsored a symposium and battlefield tour that featured the top historians in the field on the 1865 campaign in North Carolina. On Saturday, the 14th, Johnston Community College hosted the symposium and the audience heard six talks on Bentonville and the 1865 campaign.

Robert M. “Bert: Dunkerly opened the conference with an enlightening discussion on the surrender at Bennett Place which was the culmination of the campaign. While Lee’s surrender at Appomattox receives the majority of the ink, the surrender of Joe Johnston took more Confederate troops out of the war than any other act. His book, “THE CONFEDERATE SURRENDER AT GREENSBORO: THE FINAL DAYS OF THE ARMY OF TENNESSEE, APRIL 1865, is well worth the time and describes the emotional conclusion of the war for this army that is most remembered for its gallant service in the Western Theater.

Wade Sokolosky talked on the battles of Wyse Fork and Averasboro. Wyse Fork was important to Sherman as a logistical center for his main objective of Goldsboro. Wade makes the point that while Hardee was defeated at Averasboro, he accomplished his main task of buying General Johnston much needed time to gather his forces at Bentonville. His book, “NO SUCH ARMY SINCE THE DAYS OF JULIUS CAESAR, covers the campaign from Fayetteville to Averasboro and is a must read. He is working on a much anticipated book to cover the Battle of Wyse Fork.

The next speaker was **Chris Fonvielle** a friend to both CFCWRT and BCWRT. Chris delivered another outstanding talk on Wilmington in 1865. Anyone familiar with his book, LAST RAYS OF DEPARTING HOPE: THE WILMINGTON CAMPAIGN, can have any doubt that he is the leading authority on that topic.

Eric Wittenberg is the cavalry expert. His books on the cavalry operations in the Gettysburg campaign add a great deal to the body of knowledge on a Gettysburg topic that is often overlooked. His book, THE BATTLE OF MONROE’S CROSSROADS AND THE CIVIL WAR’S FINAL CAMPAIGN,

tells the story of the battle that sent Judson Kilpatrick, “bad boy” of the Federal mounted force, scurrying in the night to escape capture, leaving his woman friend to the mercy of the Federal cavalry forces. It is a well written book on one of the most interesting event of the 1865 war in North Carolina. Eric talked about Wade Hampton and his daring attack that nearly caught his hated enemy and bought valuable time for Johnston to gather his forces at Bentonville.

You can not have a major event on the Battle of Bentonville without **Mark Bradley** playing a prominent role. His book, LAST STAND IN THE CAROLINAS THE BATTLE OF BENTONVILLE is considered the definitive history. His discussion of the battle, on Saturday, was a great prelude to the battlefield tour led by him and Ed Bearss on Sunday.

The keynote speaker was the friend of the BCWRT, **Ed Bearss**, His talk on the commanders of the North Carolina campaign, exhibited his vast knowledge of the men of that era, marked with his wonderful story telling. I have always felt Ed was better in the field, than behind a podium and on Sunday he proved it again.

This collection of speakers and guides was the best one could gather for an event on the topic. Each is a leading expert in their area of study. The battlefield tour, on Sunday had two buses, one with Ed Bearss and one with Mark Bradley. So there was no wrong bus. As usual when on a guided tour, we saw places that the public cannot get to. Off the beaten, paved path, we found the well preserved Union trenches that the Union army occupied to receive the last grand charge of the Confederacy.

Many thanks go to the sponsors, **THE FRIENDS OF THE BENTONVILLE BATTLEFIELD**. **Donny Taylor** and **Derek Brown**, fine historians in their own right, and the knowledgeable staff added much to the discussions as well as acted as great hosts. This was a flawlessly run program with over 200 participants, thanks to the Bentonville Battlefield staff and all who made it such a success.

