

# ROUND TABLE REVIEW

BY MATTHEW BOROWICK

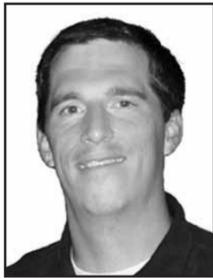
## Ladies' Forum

During the course of its publication, "Round Table Review" has explored ways to attract more members (mostly men) to Civil War round tables. It has also looked at ways to engage more young people (mostly boys). Now we focus on an overlooked but tremendously important constituency: the involvement of women in Civil War round tables.

Fortunately, there is an organization to which we can look for guidance. It has also experienced exponential membership growth in just a few years. Part of the group's success lies in finding ways to engage women in the study of the American Civil War.

That group is the very successful Brunswick (N.C.) Civil War Round Table. Its second Ladies' Forum was held Oct. 15 at Trinity United Methodist Church in Southport, where the round table meets. The first was held in February.

More than 90 ladies attended. Round table members were free and guests paid \$5 admission. Presentation topics were chosen after



Charen polled February attendees on what they would like to learn about at the next conference.

Brunswick CWRT director Charen Fink, in period dinner dress, spoke about Civil War-era courtship, marriage and domestic life. She described how many of today's wedding customs began during the Civil War. Participants received a packet of handouts with information about courtship and weddings.

Members Ed (the lone male present) and Nancy Ovsenik appeared in period dress to describe 1860s funerary customs. During their program a plate of funeral cookies was distributed to each table, bringing to life a custom no longer observed.

Following the presentations and Q&A session, 10 door prizes were awarded.

Explaining the reason for a Ladies' Forum, Charen said, "There has long been a need to address issues about women during the Civil War which is not always met at our regular meetings.

Plus, it is difficult to find women speakers."

She gave two programs for the round table: "Soldiers, Spies and Femme Fatales" and "Women of the Civil War."

"Women want to know what life was like specifically for women before, during and after the war," Charen said.

And Charen seeks feedback from Forum attendees through an evaluation form to complete at the conclusion of each program. "Most rated the conference as excellent. The majority stated they would definitely attend another conference," she said. "They liked the topics, handouts and refreshments."

Civil War Round Tables everywhere face the common problem of attracting new members. The Brunswick CWRT provides an excellent model. This round table is not just surviving — it is thriving. A major reason for the group's success is its outreach to women.

Other round tables have a similar opportunity. Through involving women we can expand the number of people with an understanding of and appreciation for that period.

We can increase membership in our organizations devoted to studying and preserving the Civil War story. And we can introduce ourselves to never-before explored topics that we would otherwise have ignored.

How might a round table begin to recruit and involve women in its activities?

Charen again provides valuable guidance: "Ask ladies in your round tables what topics about women they would like to learn about and the best day and time to meet." She found it works best when held at the same location of the regular round table meetings.



Ed and Nancy Ovsenik gave a presentation about 1860s funeral customs to the Brunswick CWRT Ladies' Forum .

"Choose a topic. Thoroughly research it," Charen advised. "Seek volunteers to help. Use period recipes for refreshments. Make packets of handouts for attendees to read at their convenience."

Charen said the "ladies only" concept makes women know they are special "so they will feel free to ask sensitive questions when men are not around."

The group's next Ladies' Forum is scheduled for April. For more information contact Charen Fink at

dcftandm@hotmail.com

For information about the 600-member Brunswick CWRT contact president Wally Rueckel at (910) 253-7382, wrueckel@questor.com or visit brunswickcivilwarroundtable.com

Matthew Borowick has spoken to numerous round tables about the *Court-Martial of Fitz John Porter*. His Civil War Round Table Handbook is available at Amazon.com. He may be reached at mbwick@comcast.net

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