

## BRUNSWICK CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

MEETING – March 2, 2021

“THREE COUPLES AT WAR...AND NOT WITH EACH ”

**SPEAKER: Peter Carmichael**

The goad for Peter Carmichael’s enthusiasm at the March meeting came from the pens of three Civil War couples and their letters. Each couple has lessons to teach.

*“We are not going to ever find the truth.”* Mr. Carmichael maintains that no single experience forms the woof of each couple’s war. William and Julia Standard of Illinois contrasted with the common notions of devotion to the Union cause. William Standard, fifteen years older than the average soldier, enlisted partly from a need for income. He did not join for the love of Lincoln or emancipation. In fact, he and his wife discussed whether he would seek imprisonment by Confederates to wait out the war in a camp and duck defense of emancipation. Although he brought along the Copperhead baggage of his life, Standard ended the war having fought throughout it. Fighting didn’t make him a Lincoln partisan, however, but he could not besmirch the honor and reputation of a good soldier by betraying the army’s cause. His truth had many sides.

*“Class matters in understanding these couples.”* John and Martha Futch of New Hanover County, NC, also contradicted the common conception of Confederate rankers rabid for slavery and their rebellious country. Neither literate, landowners, slaveowners, nor political, the Futches spent the war trading dictated letters where he asked for clothes (such as gloves) and she begged him for money. The war made destitutes of them and, besides their threadbare existence, their missives repeatedly mentioned the need for John to appear at the medical board to request discharge from the army. The Futches spent no time in their letters extolling war virtues. In fact, eventually the army shot John Futch for desertion.

*“Place matters. Location matters.”* Unlike the Futches and Standards, the Ewells came from the higher reaches of their southern society. Richard Ewell, himself a Confederate Corps commander, still found himself fighting in the war even with his leg amputation after Second Manassas. The amputation, in fact, finally drove his wealthy fiancé Elizabeth Brown into his arms in a pity marriage. Unlike the poor enlisted men, Ewell enjoyed his wife’s presence in the Corps Headquarters much to his troopers’ chagrin who characterized themselves as “under petticoat

government.” Marriages of enlisted men contracted before the war cast no doubts on their military careers. Ewell’s wartime marriage left his military qualities in question just as Elizabeth’s presence in the field did. In contrast, the other corresponding couples frequently talked about being together. A known eccentric, Ewell spent time in his tent pretending to be a bird and practicing bird calls, an activity that might have gotten a poorer enlisted man removed from the Corps. Unlike the letters of the other couples, the Ewells could spend more time discussing promotion and fellow officers.

These three examples of couples at war clearly demonstrate that you must place each in their milieu, their class, location, and rank. The connection of households to soldiers runs through all the battlefields and should never be forgotten no matter how many battlefields you visit.

By Jim Medeiros