



Call to Arms

Brunswick Civil War Round Table

The President's Corner by John Butler



Have you ever wondered what your \$25 membership dues pay for? Our dues have been \$25 for an individual or family since we started in May 2010. Member dues are our largest source of funding along with some additional money from 50/50 sales and the Sutler's table.

As you probably are aware the BCWRT has quite a few expenses to produce nine Tuesday night presentations.

Our two largest expenses are rent for Hatch Auditorium (\$600 a night) and our speaker's fees. The only two facilities in the area that can handle a CWRT of our size are Hatch Auditorium and Generations Church. Just so you know, Generations Church is a great place but is a little more expensive and cannot guarantee us our normal first Tuesday of the month meeting date. It is a great backup, when Hatch is reserved for a Baptist Function (this occurs once a year at most).

The total costs of our nine speakers are approximately \$8,000 a year. This includes speaker honorariums, travel, hotel, etc. The individual speaker fee varies due to their national recognition, location, and travel. To give you a perspective, a speaker who portrays famous Civil War figures such as Grant, Lee, Lincoln, etc. usually commands higher fees in the \$1,000 range.

Our other major expenses include funding for the Ladies' Forum (speaker, facility, etc.), the Annual BCWRT Scholarship to UNCW for Graduate Studies in Civil War History (\$1,000), and insurance. Another major expense is usually a BCWRT donation of a couple thousand dollars to a local CW historical site to promote education, interest in, and disseminating knowledge of the Civil War. The Board of Directors is always open to suggestions of Civil War sites that need funding.

The BCWRT Board of Directors watches our funds very carefully to make sure we are always being fiscally responsible.

John

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BCWRT Upcoming Events

Tuesday, December 2, 2025

“Runners and Raiders” with Jim McKee

During the Civil War, Wilmington was considered a blockade-running hub. Runners thrived, using this port to supply the Confederates with weapons, ammunition, medicine, and food by making risky trips through the Union blockade.

Wilmington’s location was ideal because it was up the Cape Fear River, safe from direct naval bombardment, and protected by Fort Fisher.



The runners’ vessels were shallow draft, slim, sleek ships designed to slip through these blockades, outrun Union warships, and make it upriver successfully to Wilmington until the fall of Fort Fisher in January, 1865. Many blockade runners who didn’t succeed are the sunken shipwrecks off the Carolina coast.

Blockade runners relied on darkness and bad weather to make their runs, ideally on moonless nights. They would have to assess blockade positions to decide which of the two inlets, separated by Smith’s Island and the Frying Pan Shoals, to determine which was less guarded.

Each trip was an exciting adventure, with threats of peril, but worth it for the incredible profits that could be realized. These were exciting times, and Jim shares his vast knowledge with such enthusiasm you would think he was there watching events unfold firsthand!

Jim McKee is a life-long student of history, and is currently Site Manager at Brunswick Town/Ft. Anderson Historic Site. The Cape Fear River broadened his interest about what took place along that river about 160+ years ago and blockade running became one of his prime interests. He has worked for the National Park Service in Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park where he helped operate two visitor centers, researched, and conducted many guided tours. Years later his career led him to the NC Maritime Museum at Southport. Jim has been an Advisor to this Round Table since its inception 15 years ago, always eager to share this thoughts and ideas which has had an impact on the organization’s success.



See page 12 for Pre-Registering for the Meeting and the link to watch on YouTube.

November Meeting Review

Revisiting Wilmington's Past by Chuck Roedema

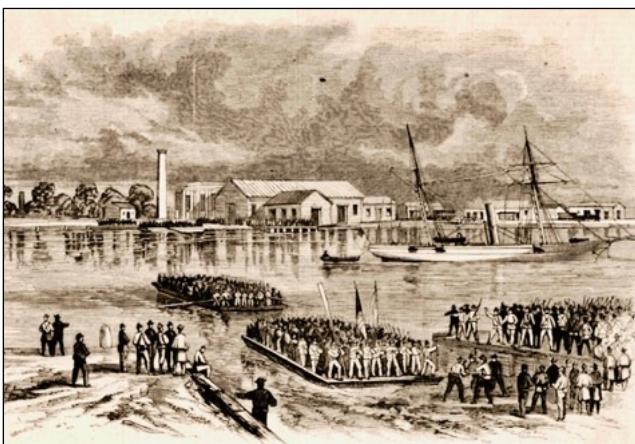


Think about shopping or dining on Front Street, or a sightseeing trip up the Cape Fear River, or perhaps walking the grounds at nearby Ft. Fisher. According to popular local historian, Dr. Chris Fonvielle, things were quite different around Wilmington about 160+ years ago.

He referred to this period as "topsy-turvy" as Wilmington transformed from a thriving prosperous Confederate port into a Union-occupied city struggling with the end of slavery and the

turmoil of Reconstruction. This was the essence of Chris's presentation to his near capacity audience at the November 4th meeting.

Appearing for the sixth time, Chris received a warm reception from friends and admirers. Shaking hands and cordial hugs prevailed as he proceeded down the aisle before the start of his presentation.



As usual, his presentation was captivating, covering rather serious topics about Wilmington; e.g., its importance as a seaport and North Carolina's largest city; the yellow fever epidemic's impact which created the name "Yellow Fever Hill," known today as Oakdale Cemetery; how the attack on Fort Fisher on Christmas, 1864, eventually led to the Confederate downfall of Wilmington; and, how the turmoil of African American lives and the impact of over-population following the end of the war created chaos for the city. Every fact, situation, and activity Chris shared captivated his audience. It was another epic program that was both enlightening and entertaining.

BCWRT Tour

Members Explore Fort Anderson with Site Manager Jim McKee

On November 5, 2025, Jim McKee, Site Manager of Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site, guided a hands-on tour of Fort Anderson for 22 members of the Brunswick Civil War Round Table. The visit highlighted the Fort's pivotal role in the Cape Fear defenses and showcased ongoing preservation efforts at the historic site.



During the tour, participants walked the earthen batteries, examined recently uncovered Civil-War-era artifacts, and heard firsthand stories of the 1865 bombardment that helped shape the region's history. McKee's deep knowledge of the site's archaeology and living-history programs brought the 19th-century landscape to life for the group.



"The tour was an outstanding blend of education and immersion," said John Butler, President of the Brunswick Civil War Round Table. "Jim's passion for Fort Anderson makes every visit unforgettable, and we're grateful for the chance to share this experience with our members."



Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site is open Tuesday – Saturday, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., with free admission. Guided tours can be arranged for groups and educational organizations by contacting the site office at (910) 398-9361.

Contact: Jim McKee, Site Manager – (910) 398-9361, Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site 8884 St. Philip's Rd SE, Winnabow, NC 28479.



Contributed by Jim Dunn with photos by John Walsh and John Butler

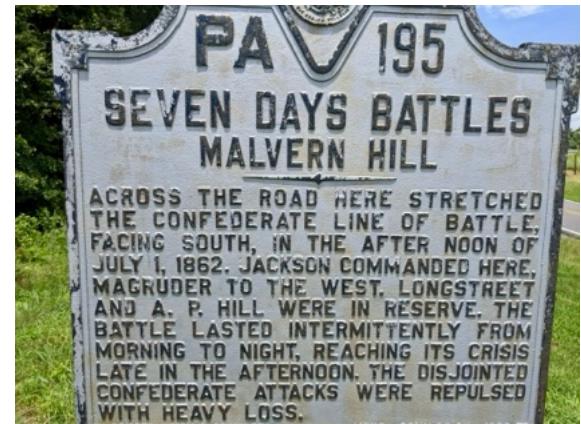
Richmond Battlefields by BCWRT Member David Vahsen

This past July before and after a visit with family in Maryland, I took a couple of short detours off the 295 Richmond bypass to visit three Civil War battlefields. The first was ten minutes east to Malvern Hill. There is no Visitors Center here but there is signage and a well-marked trail through the woods and fields.

The Seven Days Battles were a series of battles from June 25 - July 1, 1862. Lee drove the invading Union army commanded by McClellan away from Richmond, VA.

Over 5,600 Confederates were lost in successive charges into fortified Union artillery.

Though considered a Rebel defeat, it succeeded in driving McClellan's forces off the peninsula as the last of the 1862 Seven Days' battles.



Richmond National Battlefield Park

The Gathering Storm

Atop this knoll Confederate General D. H. Hill had an unobstructed view to the crest of Malvern Hill. In the distance stood the West farm house and fields where Union batteries waited to dispute any Southern advance. By early afternoon Hill's five brigades, some 6,500 men, had formed under cover of the surrounding woods and slopes along Western Run. While they waited artillery shells exploded in the treetops showering the troops with pieces of iron and falling limbs.

At 1:30 General Lee issued the order that turned a one sided exchange of artillery fire into one of the war's largest frontal assaults. For Hill's men the moment to advance was at hand.

Battle Commences

A march of less than three miles from the Glendale battlefield brought the Confederates to this spot at the foot of Malvern Hill. In earlier times it was a peaceful landscape, but on July 1 a line of Union artillery with infantry supports held the crest of the hill, not 800 yards from here. Their position was in front of the West House, which can be seen in the distance. When the Southern infantry arrived in this treeless space those guns opened fire with devastating exploding shells and solid shot. For most of the day the valley of Western Run behind you served as a natural shelter for these soldiers of General D.H. Hill's division.

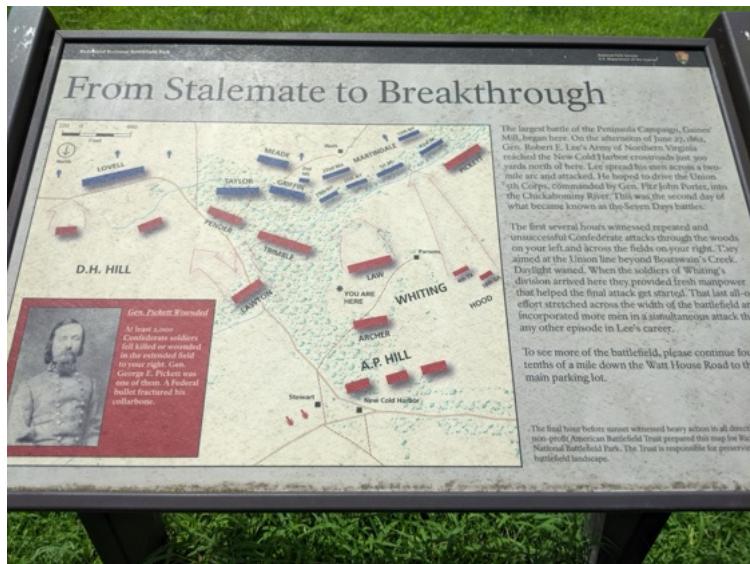
Late in the afternoon Hill's infantry began its assault against the Union position. George B. Anderson's brigade advanced part way up the hill before stalling and falling back. Other brigades fought to within 200 yards of the Union guns, but were decimated by canister rounds. The gentle slope, combined with extensive fields of fire, gave the Union artillery an ideal setting for its destructive work.

Continued on next page.

Civil War Views

Richmond Battlefields continued

The Gaines Mill and Cold Harbor battlefield sites are another 15 minutes up 295, seven miles off the bypass. This site has an insightful Visitors Center with pictures, descriptions and audio/ visual presentations of both sites.



BATTLE OF GAINES' MILL

LEE'S FIRST VICTORY

By June 27, McClellan aimed for a new base on the James River. To slow down Confederate pursuit, he deployed his 5th Corps north of the Chickahominy River. Lee seized the opportunity, hoping to drive that Union force into the river.

The ensuing battle, usually called Gaines' Mill, raged across two miles of farm fields and woodlots. The Confederates had a rare manpower advantage. They brought approximately 55,000 men to the field, confronting only 34,000 Federals. After much indecisive fighting, Lee finally hurled all of his remaining troops against the weakening Union line. Soundly defeated, the 5th Corps retreated across the Chickahominy overnight. The mutual confidence between Lee and his army, which carried them through many subsequent campaigns, originated at Gaines' Mill.



"Before the area could recover, the armies returned in the spring of 1864. The savage battle of Cold Harbor swept across some of these same farms, leaving miles of fortifications, 18,000 more casualties, and untold misery in its path."

Civil War Views

Richmond Battlefields continued

Two years later during the Overland campaign, Grant would suffer overwhelming casualties at **Cold Harbor** a mile down the road. There is a paved road that encircles the preserved battlements as well as trails and signage.



Grant's largest attack at Cold Harbor occurred on June 3, 1864. He famously wrote after the war that he "always regretted" it, because "no advantage whatever was gained to compensate for the heavy loss we sustained." Historians continue to argue about that loss, which probably numbered somewhere between 5,000 and 6,000 men. The popular tale about pessimistic Federal soldiers pinning their names on their uniforms before the attack, to help grave diggers identify their bodies, appears to be fake. But the story serves a purpose, helping to convey the gloomy futility associated with the Union attacks.

From the Cold Harbor informational board at right.

THE TRUTH ABOUT COLD HARBOR

Armies returned to the old Gaines' Mill battlefield in 1864. The first Union troops arrived at Cold Harbor on May 31. Believing that Lee's army was vulnerable, Grant repeatedly launched assaults. After four consecutive days of heavy fighting, followed by nine more days of sharpshooting and entrenching, he marched his men south toward Petersburg. Since then Cold Harbor has become one of the memorable places of the Civil War, its name forever associated with carnage and trench warfare.

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case, left
Gates converted into shovel
entrenchments.

Grant's Grand Assault

"We did not go far, only for six rods [100 feet] . . . soon . . . by the lively use of bayonets, frying-pans, tin plates, and cups, we had a temporary protection, and the satisfaction of holding practically all the ground we had been over."

Oscar Waitz, 9th Vermont Infantry

Cold Harbor is best known today for high losses among the attacking Union formations on June 3. The Sixth Corps made a small advance here, but most of the famous carnage occurred elsewhere. A few hundred yards to the north (*your right*), strongly entrenched Confederates easily smashed an isolated attack by the Eighteenth Corps. A mile to the south (*your left*) the Second Corps had nothing to show for its heavy losses.

If Grant's attack had proceeded exactly as planned, it would have been one of the most spectacular and complicated assaults of the war in Virginia. Instead, only three of the Union army's five infantry corps advanced across a three-mile front. Unconnected with each other, they fought individual battles and suffered separate failures. Lack of coordination among the attackers is considered one of the primary causes of Grant's defeat on June 3. Union soldiers occupied this line through June 12.

The Ladies' Forum

The Ladies' Forum

On October 20, 2025 the Brunswick County Civil War **Ladies' Forum** held their annual meeting at the Trinity United Methodist Church in Southport, NC.



Emily Lapisardi portrayed Confederate spy Rose O'Neal Greenhow who was a prominent Washington socialite during the period before the war. She moved in important political circles and cultivated friendships with presidents, generals, senators, and high-ranking military officers. Once the war began, her life was marked by daring espionage, influential social connections, and unwavering dedication to the Southern cause.

She was jailed in Washington, D.C. for espionage, deported back to the Confederacy, and resumed spying.



Thank you to all the volunteers who helped to put this event together. See you next year!

Robbin Smith

Videos of the event can be found on our YouTube site. You can watch Rose Greenhow brought to life by Emily Lapisardi. Click [here](#).

For Charen Fink's entertaining presentation about Civil War etiquette, click [here](#).

Volunteers created Civil War era baked goods for everyone to enjoy. You will find the recipes [here](#).

Charen Fink added to the event with her presentation on Social Etiquette during the Civil War Era.



Civil War Christmas

“Christmas Bells” from an American Battlefield Trust article

“I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” has been a popular Christmas carol since the first musical version appeared in 1872. It was originally a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and has its roots in the Civil War.

Longfellow wrote the piece on Christmas Day in 1863. Nine months earlier his son, Charles Appleton Longfellow, snuck away from home and enlisted in the Federal army in Washington, D.C. While at dinner on December 1, 1863, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow received a telegram. His son had been severely wounded in a skirmish on November 27. Longfellow immediately set out for Washington, arriving there on December 3. After two more days

of waiting, Charles arrived by train. According to the poet, “the army surgeon who came with the wounded alarmed me by saying that his duty to himself and to me required him to say that the wound was a very serious one and paralysis might ensue.” That evening three more surgeons gave another more favorable report. Charles “will be long in healing.” Though Charles survived his wound, his military career was over. In summarizing the ordeal to a friend, Henry Longfellow wrote, “I have been through a great deal of trouble and anxiety.” This “trouble and anxiety” is evident in the lines of the poem, “Christmas Bells” - the basis for the popular Christmas carol.

I Heard the Bells of Christmas Day



*I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
and wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."*

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Meeting Photo Gallery

Photos From November 2025 Meeting



“A Town Turned
Topsy Turvy -
Wilmington in
the Civil War”



Chris Fonveille



Pictures by John Butler and Chuck Roedema

Sutler's Table

Book Sale

We started our “**Bag of Books**” Sale at the meeting in November. We will be continuing the sale at our December meeting. We still have a LOT of books. Buy a bag of books and you are sure to find a couple of very interesting ones for yourself or for a gift. Tis the season!



We will have bags in two sizes containing pre-selected books.

Small Bag \$5

Large Bag \$10

The large size bag will include some premium books.



Other books will also be available for purchase as usual.

The Sutler's Table also has a variety of merchandise other than books. We have BCWRT shirts for both men and women as well as caps, our logo decal, and free tour maps.

Polo Shirts with embroidered logo \$35

T-Shirts with printed logo \$22

Caps with logo \$18

Decal with logo \$1

Shirts and caps are in a variety of colors and sizes.



Picture of one of the Ladies' shirts



Don't forget to get your 50/50 ticket.

Local Events



Discover Southport History

SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SECOND TUESDAY PROGRAM

"Washington Irving, Helping to Revive Christmas in America"

By Historian Desiree Bridge

Before Charles Dickens, there was an American author who helped introduce older Christmas traditions to American readers and whose writings on Christmas customs would influence later writers.

Tuesday, December 9, 10 am Harper Library

Reservations strongly suggested:

910.457.6237

Door Prize: Two tickets to the 2025 Holiday Home Tour.

Pre-Register for the December Meeting

Starting Friday, November 21, and lasting until noon on Tuesday, December 2, current members may log into the system -<https://olr.bcwrt-nc.org/> - to print a ticket (one each for yourself and your spouse) showing you've registered.

When you use the online system it will clearly show if you are current (dues paid)...and what to do if you are not up to date. It's that simple!

The Wilmington Campaign "Last Rays of Departing Hope"



Blue & Gray Education Society

One-Day Seminar

February 12, 2026

Fort Fisher State Historic Site Visitor Center

9:30 am to 4:00 pm

Cost: \$25

Guest Speakers

Dr. Chris Fonvielle Jr.

Andrew Duppstadt / Jim McKee / Becky Sawyer / Wade Sokolosky

For more information, contact:

Wade Sokolosky

BgesExDir@gmail.com / (434) 770-7325

All Proceeds go to Battlefield Interpretation

Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

Wilmington's Cape Fear Civil War Round Table will enjoy a special members only holiday meeting in December and will resume their regular meeting schedule on January 8, 2026.

YouTube™ Live

If you are unable to attend the meeting in person, you will be able to watch it via YouTube Live Streaming by using the following link:

<https://youtube.com/live/o48sfwaZuhQ?feature=share>

To view at home on your TV, you can "cast" or "mirror" from your phone to your TV. If you are unfamiliar with this, click [here](#) for a link to instructions for how to do this.

The **BCWRT YouTube Video Library** is where you will find all of the videos that have been created:

<https://www.youtube.com/@brunswickcivilwarroundtabl4954/videos>

Notes from the November 2025 Board of Directors Meeting

1. Our November meeting with Chris Fonvielle was well attended and a great many members remained for the Q&A period afterward.
2. The Ladies' Forum was successful with about 90 women attending. The presentations in costume by both Emily Lapisardi and Charen Fink were enjoyed and both were recorded and have been uploaded to our website.
3. We will continue with the Christmas "Bag of Books" sale at the December meeting.
4. Elections for Board members will be held in December. We have not received any new nominations for any of the positions.
5. A tour led by Chris Fonvielle of Oakdale Cemetery in Wilmington may be planned for the future. There will also be tours of Fort Caswell and Fort Fisher later in this season.

Our next Board meeting is Tuesday, December 9, 2025. Meetings are held monthly to discuss items that will make our round table more interesting, run better, and keep our membership engaged. President John Butler leads the two-hour meeting that includes interested Advisors and members. The meetings are held at Trinity United Methodist Church in Southport one week following our gathering at Hatch and begin at 10:00 am. If you wish to attend or have suggestions for the Board, please contact John Butler at jbutler2007@gmail.com.

All of the BCWRT Leadership Team wishes every member and their family a happy and safe holiday season. We thank you for your support during 2025 and look forward to bringing you more educational programs in the coming year about the Civil War.

Christmas During the Civil War

In the United States, the widespread customs of Christmas cards, carols, and trees date back to the 1850s. The Christmas tree was a beloved symbol of the American family Christmas. Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, brought the custom to England from his native country, Germany.

Cartoon artist, Thomas Nast, created many visuals and is credited with the first images of Santa Claus, taken from his native German portrait of St. Nicholas in a red, white, and blue suit with stars.



When toys were not available during the blockade in the South, mothers told their children Santa would not be able to run the blockade or that he had already been shot by the Yankees.

In Georgia, General Sherman dressed his mules as reindeer and loaded wagons with gifts, food, and supplies for the destitute Southerners.

Carols, such as Silent Night, were sung in homes and camps by homesick soldiers during the war.

Although Christmas was celebrated in both the United States and the Confederate States of America, the day was not recognized until 1870, when President Ulysses S. Grant made Christmas an official federal holiday in an attempt to unite the North and South.

From our archives - This article by Charen Fink appeared in our December 2021 Call to Arms by E. Gifford Stack.



Muster Notes and Notables

**The December BCWRT meeting is Tuesday, December 2, 2025.
Hatch Auditorium, NC Baptist Assembly, Fort Caswell, Oak Island, NC.
See page 11 for details to attend via YouTube.**

Registration begins at 6:15 pm and the meeting starts promptly at 7:00 pm.

Mail Dues Checks to: BCWRT, PO Box 10161, Southport, NC. 28461.
(Please include your current phone number, street address, and email.)

2025-2026 Officers, Directors, and Advisors

John Butler: President & Director

Ann Birdsall: VP & Director

Jim Dunn: VP & Director

Jennifer Chapman: Secretary & Director

Tom Kehoe: Treasurer & Director

Bruce Jordan: Director

Chuck Roedema: Director

Gar Dowell: Advisor

Charen Fink: Advisor

Chris Fonvielle: Advisor

Jim McKee: Advisor

Chris Mackowski: Advisor

Skip Maxwell: Advisor

Roy Pender: Advisor

Wally Rueckel: Advisor

Wade Sokolosky: Advisor

Robbin Smith: Advisor

Len Trzinski: Advisor

John Wall: Advisor

Angela Zombek: Advisor

Connect with us



We Welcome Your Suggestions for our Speakers, Website, Meeting Procedures, Membership Retention, etc.

The Brunswick Civil War Round Table does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, religion, age, sexual orientation, creed, ancestry, disability or any other legally protected status in its educational programs, activities, or membership.

BCWRT is a 501 (c) (3) tax exempt organization,
co-founded by Tom O'Donnell and Wally Rueckel and organized in May 2010.

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