



General Orders

Harrington's Brigade

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APRIL, 2021 MEETING
Thursday, April 15, 7:00 pm
Fellowship Period from 6:30 to 7:00 pm

Virtual Meeting Via Zoom
(please refer to article on page 3 of
September's newsletter for detailed
information regarding using Zoom)

The HCWRT Presents Stephen Kinnaman Speaking on:

“Merrimack: Biography of a Steam Frigate”

The USS Merrimack has long been linked to the first duel of ironclads, an epic Civil War battle fought at Hampton Roads between the *Monitor* and *Merrimack*. But over time, the myth of the *Merrimack*—actually the CSS *Virginia*—displaced the memory of a magnificent antebellum U.S. Navy warship. The Steam Frigate *Merrimack* lost her identity. Nearly forgotten is the story of the original *Merrimack*, the namesake of a class of six powerful war steamers. When built, she was the largest vessel in the U.S. Navy, the nation's first screw-propelled frigate and the first major warship to be armed entirely with shell-firing guns. Her first commission took her on a tour of the principal naval stations of Europe. During her second commission, she served as flagship of the Navy's Pacific Squadron, cruising the distant shores of Chile, Peru, Panama, Hawaii, Mexico and Nicaragua.

Through copious use of *Merrimack's* deck logs, official correspondence, contemporary newspapers and journals, and original

construction plans, Stephen Kinnaman's research illuminates the mechanical issues and human interactions that indelibly shaped *Merrimack's* brief career. Mr. Kinnaman provides an unparalleled glimpse into the day-to-day events that defined the life of an active antebellum warship.

Many of the officers who served on the steam frigate would find their careers inextricably linked to *Merrimack*. Lieutenant Catesby Roger Jones, her gunnery officer, later commanded the Confederate Ironclad *Virginia*, a ship built from *Merrimack's* charred hull. Ashton Ramsay, the ironclad's chief engineer, had also served on *Merrimack* as did officers who later fought for the Union—Lieutenants Jonathan Wainwright, Joseph Smith, Daniel Ammen and Chief Engineer Alban Stimers. Their links to the Steam Frigate *Merrimack* breathe life into the tale of a true ship of destiny.



Stephen Kinnaman

But Mr. Kinnaman will provide more than just a summary of the ship's operational life. A professional engineer, he will dissect the origins of her design and compares the *Merrimack* class steam frigates to contemporary U.S. warships.

He will also examine the controversy surrounding her troubled engines, documenting their performance using archived drawings and steam log data.

In summary, Mr. Kinnaman, in relating the story of this warship, embraces the many threads of a bygone era—history, biography, geography and technology—and has woven them together to tell the story of the U.S. Steam Frigate *Merrimack*.



About Stephen Kinnaman

Stephen Chapin Kinnaman has long had an abiding interest in ships and the sea. He is a naval architect and marine engineer, experienced in vessel design, marine operations and shipbuilding, and an alumnus of the University of Michigan and Cambridge University. Stephen's first career was in the offshore oil industry, where he worked as an international consultant to shipyards, rig operators, oil companies and engineering contractors. Lately he has pursued a second career as a naval historian focusing on navies of the Civil War era. Stephen has published three works of history: *Merrimack, The Biography of a Steam Frigate* (October 2018); *Captain Bulloch: The Life of James Dunwoody Bulloch, Naval Agent of the Confederacy* (August 2013); and *The Most Perfect Cruiser: How James Dunwoody Bulloch Constructed and Equipped the Confederate States Steamer Alabama*

(March 2009). He is now writing his fourth book, a biography of the man who designed the Steam Frigate *Merrimack* and many other famous warships, Naval Constructor John Lenthall.

In pursuit of *Merrimack's* story, Stephen visited the National Archives in Washington, D.C. There he examined, page by page, the four volumes of *Merrimack's* log books spanning the entirety of her life as a commissioned U.S Navy warship. Details of her sea passages, the actions of her officers and crew, the performance of her machinery and descriptions of her ports of call were all recorded on the logs' musty pages. Copies of letters from the secretary of the Navy to her captains and her captains' reports back to the Navy Department were also closely read and blended into Stephen's *Merrimack* narrative. The search for visual context led to the Navy's original plans for *Merrimack* which were copied and reproduced in his book. All these essential elements of the ship's history have been woven together and brought to life in his book *Merrimack, The Biography of a Steam Frigate*.

Stephen Kinnaman and his wife Maureen Carroll live on their 'country place' in scenic Chappell Hill, Texas. Both Stephen and Maureen are proud members of the Houston Civil War Round Table.



COMMANDER'S CORNER

By Mike Harrington

Ordinarily, our meeting in May concludes each yearly campaign. At their spring meeting, the directors ratified the decision to extend this year's campaign to June, in part due to the cancellation of the February meeting. The

directors also decided to defer until the June meeting the formal election of directors and officers for the next campaign. Typically, our Round Table elects directors and officers at the May meeting, and announces the slate of nominees in the April newsletter. This year, the announcement of the full slate of candidates will take place in the May newsletter, but I am delighted to inform you now that Gene Boisaubin and Keith Altavilla have agreed to stand for election as our President and Vice President, respectively.

Gene and Keith have been active in Houston Civil War Round Table for several years now. However, for the benefit of those members who may not be familiar with them, I want to share a little background information about these two distinguished gentlemen.

Eugene V. Boisaubin, Jr., MD and FACP, is a native of the Show-Me State of Missouri. He earned a bachelor's degree in Zoology and Art History from Washington University in St. Louis. Gene is a 1971 graduate of the University of Missouri School of Medicine, who came to Houston to complete his professional training at Baylor College of Medicine. He joined the Department of Internal Medicine at McGovern Medical School at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston in 2001 as a professor of medicine with tenure, having previously been a faculty member at Baylor College of Medicine and UTMB in Galveston. Dr. Boisaubin is also active on the medical staff at Memorial Hermann Hospital and the LBJ General Hospital, and he is also affiliated with the University Clinical Research Center as an ethicist for clinical research and as a faculty associate in the Program on Humanities and Technology in Health Care. Knowing Gene as I do, I expect him to introduce some new ideas to our Round Table.

Keith F. Altavilla, Ph.D. is a 2007 graduate of Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. He obtained a Ph.D. in History from Texas Christian University in 2013. After receiving his doctorate, Keith acted during the next two years as the Rowan Postdoctoral Fellow in the U.S. Military Academy's History Department, where he developed content for the West Point History of Warfare project. Keith joined the History Department at Lone Star College in 2016, and

currently he is Professor of History at Lone Star College-CyFair Campus, where he teaches courses on both U.S. and world history.

Both Gene and Keith are enthusiastic about continuing the legacy of Houston Civil War Round Table as a venue for the "study and discussion of the history, battles, personalities and significant events of the War Between the States," to quote from the 1954 charter of our organization.

It has been my privilege to serve as your President for the current campaign as well as the two preceding campaigns. In stepping down as President after three years of service, I am confident that, if they are elected, both Gene Boisaubin and Keith Altavilla will make terrific officers and leaders of the Houston Civil War Round Table.



MEMBERSHIP REPORT

By Walker Agnew

Even with the challenging past year we have experienced, the Houston Civil War Round Table has been able to add new members. Many have joined because someone invited them to attend one of our meetings. We appreciate everyone who has helped keep us together this year by bringing in new members.

Be sure to log in early (beginning at 6:30 pm) to the April 15th meeting for our fellowship period. See you then!

A personal invitation is still the best way to get the word out. Let me know of any ideas you may have for the membership committee. My email address is walkeragnew@comcast.net.

