



# DRUM AND BUGLE CALL

## MAHONING VALLEY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

**DATE:** Monday, April 8, 2019 @ 6:30 PM

**LOCATION:** A La Cart Catering, 429 Lisbon Street, Canfield, Ohio 44406

**SPEAKER:** A. Wilson Greene

### 'A Perfect Hell of Blood'

**David Duchek**, Editor / Publisher.....330.207.8810

**Gary Wholf**, Program Director.....330.953.1965

**Hugh Earnhart**, Reservations.....330.757.4727

[www.mahoningvalleycwrt.com](http://www.mahoningvalleycwrt.com)

The Petersburg Campaign lasted 292 days—from June 15, 1864 to April 3, 1865. But the day that most resonates with students of the Civil War is July 30, 1864, when a huge mine exploded beneath a prominent Confederate fort, leading to seven hours of the most hideous close-quarters fighting in American history. The Battle of the Crater, called by General Grant “the saddest affair I have witnessed in the war,” is widely understood in its most basic

outlines. Tonight, **A. Wilson Greene** will explore this famous engagement and offer new insights into the conduct and context of the fight. His talk is adapted from his most recent book, *A Campaign of Giants: The Battle for Petersburg*, the first of three volumes on the Petersburg Campaign for the University of North Carolina Press’ Civil War America series. *You can read a review by David Frank on Page 2.*

Greene received his B.A. in American History from Florida State University in 1972 and his M.A. in American History from Louisiana State University in 1977. From 1995 to 2017, he served as the President and CEO of Pamplin Historical Park and the National Museum of the Civil War Soldier, where he was able to “plan, develop, and manage a major historic site complex from its inception.” Consisting of 422 acres, Pamplin Historical Park is on the National Register of Historic Places and the Breakthrough Battlefield there is a National Historic Landmark.

Along with a shelf full of books, Greene has published numerous essays, articles, and reviews for historical journals and Civil War magazines. He regularly presents at Civil War Round Tables throughout the country and, as one of two Civil War scholars employed by The Smithsonian, he has lead tours for Smithsonian Journeys Travel since 1989. “I am physically familiar with almost all Civil War battlefield and historic sites and have led tours on most of them,” he said, “and am perhaps one of three historians nationwide with these credentials.”

Greene is a longtime friend (and honorary member) of the Mahoning Valley Civil War Round Table, having lead the group on numerous tours throughout the years. He and his wife, Maggie, live in Signal Mountain, TN.



## Family letters offer first-hand insight into Petersburg Campaign

By **DAVID DUCHEK**

The elegantly handwritten letters are pressed between two panes of glass so that interested observers can read both sides of the aged pages. There is a sentimentality to the preservation of these personal family letters; but there is a historical significance to them as well, for they offer a bird’s eye view of a Civil War soldier’s ex-

periences during the fourth bloody year of the war.

Dr. Holly Ray, a veterinarian from Champion and a longtime member of the Mahoning Valley Civil War Round Table, recently shared the story of these remarkable family heirlooms.

“I’ve been a Civil War enthusiast since my junior high days,” Ray said. “I remember seeing the letters as a

little girl.” She recalled in particular “the beauty of the penmanship.”

How did these artifacts come into her possession? “My mother had them,” she said. “I didn’t know where they came from... but it became my mission to find out.” And so she did.

Like most family historians, Ray began her armchair research by examining her family’s ancestry. She ulti-

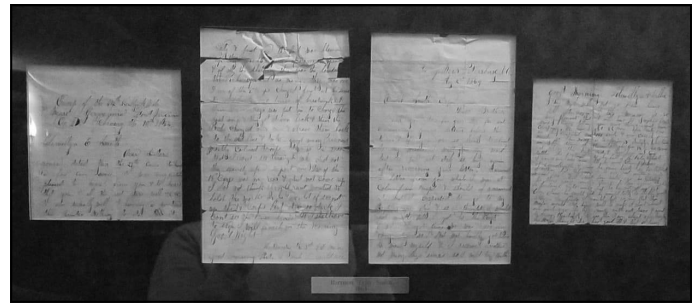
mately discovered that she was related to the letter writer on her maternal grandfather's side of the family.

The three letters were written by Ray's great-great-great uncle, Harrison Tyler Smith, of the 64th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment, Co. D. One of the recipients was Harrison's brother (and Ray's great-great-great grandfather) Erastus W. Smith, Esq. Erastus, himself a veteran of Co. D of the 64th New York, received a disability discharge in January 1863 and was home in New York. The other letters were addressed to Harrison's sister-in-law, Llewellyn (the wife of Erastus) and his niece, Lillie (the daughter of Erastus and Llewellyn). Harrison wrote the letters shortly before he was killed at Hatcher's Run during the Petersburg Campaign.

One of the letters dated August 2nd, 1864, appears to describe the action at the Crater on July 30, 1864: "Just as we

*arrived in sight of the city there was a Rebel fort blown up opisit the 9th Corps about ½ mile on the left of the city & just as the fort was blown up there was 150 pieces of cannon opened & of all the shelling this was the lowdest. The Rebs opened as many. Ther was one Drive of the 9th Corps char-aged first at the same time & took two lines of breastworks & then the Darkeys was put in to charge the last one & they got driven back & then the Rebs charged our men & drove them back to the old line & took a good many Pris-ners mostly colored troops..."*

Aside from the detailed battle observations above, Harrison's letters also contain many of the themes common



among tens of thousands of soldiers' letters during the war: well wishes for the folks back home and commentaries about everything from camp life to long marches and incompetent military leadership.

Take the latter, for example: "I should think the Gen. would take heed now & not go blindfolded in to a plac whare they know the men are going to be shot down lie hail falling from the clouds as the did in this last rade over the Rapadan if the stores is true we lost a good many men for nothing, it was the third drive that lost the men & the story is that the Gen. was very drunk & went over the river with out orders that Day got surrounded..."

Altogether, the letters represent a moment frozen in time that is intimately personal to the writer's descendants but also historically significant to the study of the American Civil War.

Thanks to Dr. Holly Ray for sharing the story of her family letters. She has agreed to bring the framed letters to this month's meeting so you can view them for yourself.

## "Southern Pride" print raffle set for November

**First prize:** A professionally framed and matted black-and-white print (top right) of a Confederate Cavalryman, signed by Dale Gallon. The date on the print is 1997. The detail is outstanding. It is a full-sized print, the frame measuring 23" x 26". Secondary market value is \$275.

**Second prize:** A series of black-and-white prints (below right) of Generals Lee, Jackson, Sherman, and Grant; frames measure 12" x 16".

Tickets will be on sale at our September, October, and November meetings. The cost is \$5 per ticket. Only 50 tickets will be sold and the winning tickets will be drawn at our November meeting. Winners need not be present.



## YOU SHOULD READ... *A Campaign of Giants: The Battle for Petersburg*

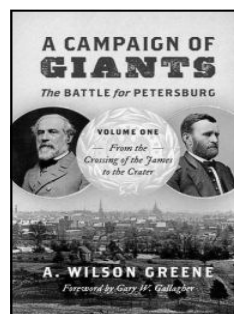
By DAVID FRANK

Will Greene has spent years studying the year-long campaign to secure the transportation hub of the Confederacy's crown jewel, Richmond. This is but volume one of a trilogy on that campaign, an opus of exhaustive research. It covers Grant's changing his base of operations by crossing the James River to the fiasco of the Crater assault.

Will pulls the curtain back on many of the myths and misunderstandings of the campaign. Petersburg is often perceived as a siege fought from trenches rather than mobile Federal columns constantly probing and striking the Rebel lines and met by Lee's countermoves. The author combines analysis of the strategy and leadership with detailed

maps of the armies' movements and operations. The text is enriched with the personal observations of the officers and enlisted men serving in the ranks who endured the campaign.

Will spends a great deal of time analyzing the leadership tangle of Grant, Meade, Burnside, and their obstinate corps commanders facing unrelenting combat. He feels that while Grant directed the operations, he remained detached from the actual execution of



those orders, leaving that to Meade. This is the style Grant embraced in the Western Theater.

Lee also faced numerous challenges in dealing with the pressure of Federal forces constantly attempting to break his lines from flank to flank. A misstep on his part could have easily lead to ultimate disaster for the fledgling Confederacy. Lee also faced difficulties in managing his key officer corps due to attrition, and he found himself intimately involved in directing the battle tactics to counterpunch Grant's moves.

This book is rich in meticulous detail and well footnoted. In fact, the footnotes are peppered with Will's signature witticism's and personal observations.

You're in for a real treat tonight...