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The Civil War Round Table: Fifty Years of Scholarship and Fellowship. By Barbara Hughett. (Chicago: The Civil War Round Table, 1990. Pp. xviii, 206. \$30.00)

Today, there are more than 150 Civil War Round Tables in this country, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Belgium, and Norway. All Round Table organizations owe their existence to "The Civil War Round Table," the brainchild of Chicago bookseller Ralph Newman and some of his friends. Born in the 1930s as an informal gathering of Civil War buffs, the Round Table began regular meetings in 1940. Fifty years later, this group is still going strong.

Member Barbara Hughett penned this readable history for the Round Table's fiftieth anniversary. She interviewed members and read through the organization's archives in order to gather information. The book is chronological in approach. Included are biographies of the founders, information on meeting places, awards, publications, speakers, and field trips.

As an institutional history, this book presents an overview of the Round Table in an admirable way. The author captures the essence of the organization and its numerous achievements. Rather than turgidly describe every event and every speaker, Hughett writes about the highlights of each year's programs and activities. The book thus moves along and does not mire the reader in arcane trivia.

The author admits that her chronicle is an insider's view of The Round Table. A large part of the book is anecdotal and personal history, but Hughett transcends the usual such works and has produced a first-rate history of an important social and cultural organization. Fifty years ago, there were no round tables. Today it is hard to imagine the Civil War scene without them. Led by The Round Table, the CWRT organizations have been in the forefront of battlefield preservation. Many Civil War scholars have been discovered by round tables, which nurtured and encouraged them.

The discerning reader of this tome will find everything about The Round Table worth knowing. Thirteen appendices include a complete list of speakers and their topics, awards, battlefield tour locations, officers, songs and poetry written by members for special occasions, and other fascinating tidbits. A useful index and a generous number of photographs make this book an important contribution to Civil War cultural history. Years from now, when future scholars want to know what twentieth-century Americans did to memorialize the Civil War, they will turn first to Hughett's book.

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