

Civil War Round Table marks 25th

Aficionados of War Between the States pool knowledge, sponsor speakers

By "SAM" BOYER

Staff writer

A GROUP DEDICATED TO events of the past is making its own sort of history this year. The Western Reserve Civil War Round Table, founded in Olmsted Falls, is celebrating its silver anniversary this year.

It was April 15, 1965, when Dr. William P. Mahoney Jr., invited residents of the southwest suburbs, through an article in the old *Berea News*, to join a group dedicated to the study of the war between the states. While there was a Cleveland Round Table in existence, Mahoney found that people who worked in the suburbs often had difficulty getting to the Tuesday evening meetings.

He found an immediate ally in his neighbor at the time, William Stewart, a former Olmsted Falls councilman who was originally from the south and had a treasured collection of notebooks, letters and diaries from the time of his great uncle and great-grandfather who fought in the Civil War, Mahoney said.

Both Stewart and Mahoney lived in homes whose original structures preceded the Civil War.

Mahoney's own interest was sparked by a college professor at Western Reserve University, where he was attending undergraduate and medical school.

"I had an American History professor who had been president of the National Phi Beta Kappa. His presentation of the Civil War from the southern point of view, even though he had never lived there, intrigued me," Mahoney said. "It was the first time I had thought of the Civil War in that regard."

His interest continued during his internship in Madison, Wisconsin, where he was lucky enough to meet a physician who belonged to the Round Table there, and paid his dues during those years when money was scarce. "I was poor as a church mouse," he said.

He maintains his interest in the south's point of view — jokingly referring the war "the northern incursion," or "the rebellion."

Following a stint as a flight surgeon in the U.S. Marines, Mahoney came to Olmsted Falls in 1961 to set up his practice, and that's when he found the difficulty in getting to the Cleveland meetings and decided to try to set up a suburban chapter.

It didn't take long for the idea to catch on, and now there are several dozen members who come from as far away as Lorain and Lake counties. Ten years ago, the club went co-ed, so there are several women members now, including a few from the southwest suburbs.

Many members have specific topics of interest, while Mahoney and others, have a more general interest in the time period.

"I thought I knew a little about the subject until I joined the Round Table (in Madison)," Mahoney said. "The members were doctors, lawyers, judges and professors whose doctoral theses had been on the Civil War. Many of them could tell you who was standing shoulder to shoulder, private beside private in the lines at a certain battle."

That kind of knowledge is not a prerequisite for membership, he was quick to point out. The club



Framed pictures of Civil War memorabilia are part of Mahoney's collection.

welcomes anyone with a sincere interest in the war who is willing to learn.

The Western Reserve chapter meets at the Colony Room at Baldwin-Wallace College on the second Wednesday of each month from September through May. Members meet for dinner and feature a guest speaker. One nice thing about it is that the local club meets the evening after the Cleveland Round Table. Often the groups share the expense of a nationally known speaker, who makes the trip to town for both meetings.

"The variety of interests of the members is vast," Mahoney said. "We have people who are experts on one battle; people who are button experts; people who are cannon experts; George Woodling has his own horse and a full uniform and is involved in re-enactments of battles; Don Haberman is a miniature enthusiast. That's the beauty of it."

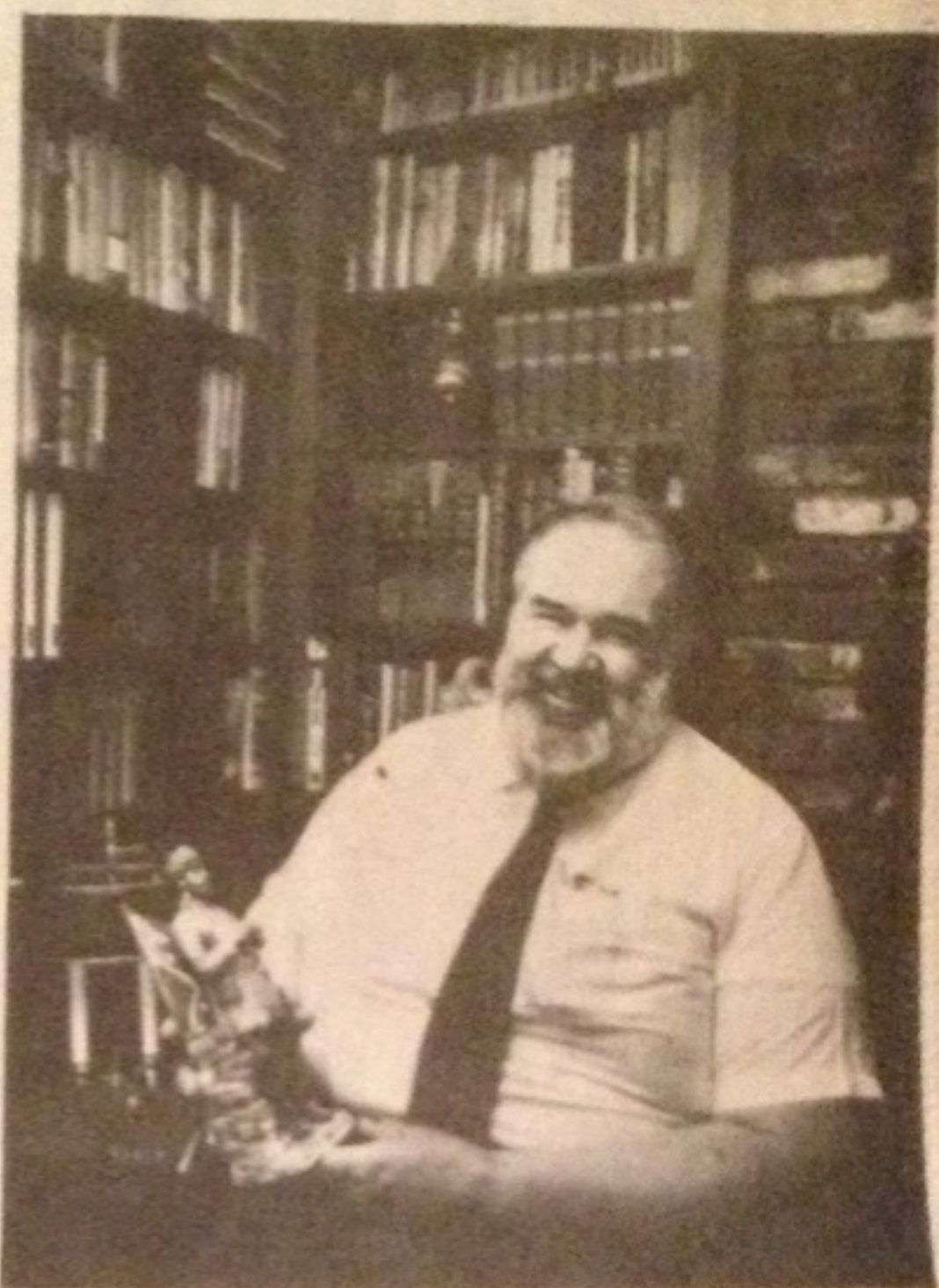
Homer Taft of Bay Village, for instance, is a descendant of the 103rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry who belongs to that organization, as well. "It's an addictive subject," he said. "Especially when you start going through old records. There are just so many interesting stories."

As one of his projects, Mahoney has made a movie about the life of General Turner Ackley, a member of the staff of Gen. Stonewall Jackson.

The new president for 1990-91, is George Rolleston of Berea. A sociologist by training, his interest is in the political and social aspects of the time period. Director of financial aid for Baldwin-Wallace, Rolleston was sitting in Mahoney's office one day and happened to see a notice about the Round Table. "I was surprised to find it was meeting here," he said. "My interest was first cultivated as a boy during the centennial." He joined the group about three years ago.

Rolleston has found the speakers to be very enjoyable, no matter what their subject is. May's speaker talked about the first ladies, from Martha Washington to Eleanor Roosevelt, and kept the group spellbound for two hours.

He also finds the club enjoyable



Dr. William Mahoney is the founder of the Western Reserve Civil War Round Table which meets now in Berea.

because of the common interest all the members share.

Mahoney said there has been a renewed interest in the Civil War since the centennial was celebrated in 1961-65. It stimulated people to look in old trunks and in their attics for family remembrances of the war. He said that is another fascinating aspect — there are still undiscovered items lying about in attics and basements, untouched since that time period.

One of the best places in the country to find artifacts, the members said, is nearby Ashland, which opens the college convocation center each year to a meeting and sale.

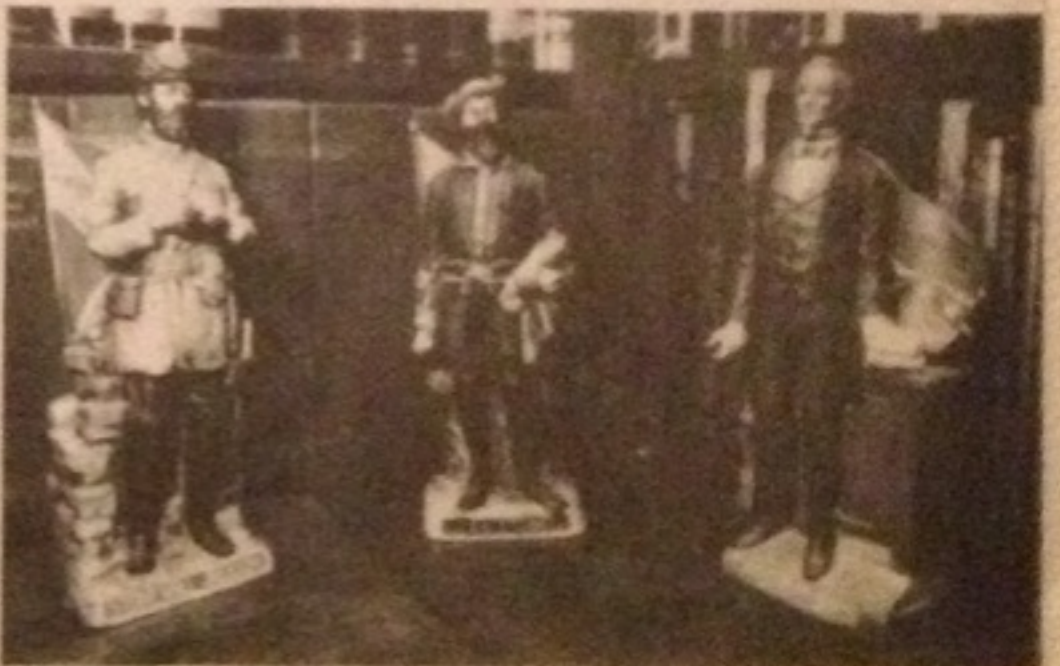
As a national organization the Round Table has found itself fighting for preservation of historic sites — against developers who would

rather see condominiums and shopping centers than preserved battlefields and museums.

Among the other local members are Marilyn Trepanier of Middleburg Heights; Tim Bouty, Farrell and Chris Kleem of Berea; William Hebel of Strongsville; Dave and Lou Hardman and Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Haberecht of Olmsted Falls and James Larj of North Royalton.

Haberman, a former resident of Berea now living in Parma, is the only other original member of the organization, aside from Mahoney. His wife, Nancy, joined when it opened to women.

"It seems a romantic time — a thing of old southern hospitality and chivalry. You get a strange fixation about it — I think everyone pretty much feels that way," said Haberman.



Statues of the Civil War-era presidents grace the library of Mahoney's home.