

The Outpost

The Newsletter of the Salt Creek Civil War Round Table
Vol. LVII No. 9 May 2019



523rd Regular Meeting

DATE: Friday, May 17, 2019
PLACE: Oak Trace, 200 Village Drive, Downers Grove, IL
TIME: 8:00 p.m.
TOPIC: “Hotbed of Secession—Wisconsin???”
SPEAKER: Jerry Allen

In recent times, more than ten organizations around the country have urged separation from the United States. For example, in May 2014 Wisconsin Republicans at their annual convention defeated a resolution demanding that legislators pass bills affirming the state’s right to secede and nullify federal laws. One might think that the resolution was resoundingly defeated, but the vote was 303-145. So, one-third of the delegates thought Wisconsin had a right to secede from the Union.

Outsiders might be surprised by this, but people familiar with Wisconsin’s history before the Civil War aren’t surprised at all. We often hear about South Carolina being the Hotbed of Secession because it led the list of states to secede from the Union. While Carolina had its Fire Eaters, Wisconsin had rabid abolitionists, including Governor Alexander Randall. He hated slavery and was appalled by the Fugitive Slave Law. He felt it was intolerable for federal agents to come into Wisconsin, kidnap residents, and send them back south to slavery.

By 1860 anti-slavery feelings were running very high in Wisconsin. In March, a member of the Wisconsin legislature introduced a bill to declare war on the United States unless it abolished slavery. Although the bill went nowhere, secession had vocal support throughout the state. The election of Abraham Lincoln and the start of the Civil War would change everything, and Wisconsin folks would be staunch defenders of the Union. But, who knows? If Abraham Lincoln had lost the 1860 election, the words “too small for a republic and too large for an insane asylum” may have been in reference to Wisconsin and not South Carolina.

Jerry Allen grew up on a farm in La Crosse County, Wisconsin, with a predominantly Norwegian heritage. He attended the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse with a BS in Mathematics and Physics and received a MS degree in Mathematics from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Jerry retired six years ago after working 40 years as a pension consultant in Atlanta and Chicago. Jerry and his wife, Ellen, live in Cary, Illinois during Summer & Fall and in Hoover, Alabama during the Winter & Spring.

Although not a professional historian, Jerry has had a life-long interest in history with a special interest in the Civil War. He is a member of various Civil War Round Tables including the Salt Creek CWRT and a past president of the CWRT of Chicago and the Northern Illinois CWRT.

APRIL MEETING UPDATE by Art Foley

At the April meeting John Matuszek spoke to the membership about “Sherman’s Working Battery: 1st Illinois Light Artillery, Battery H.” A summation of the unit’s service is best recapitulated on the web page *1st Illinois Artillery Regiment History*:

Battery H was recruited in and about Chicago, by Captain Axel Silversparre, during January and February 1862. In March it was ordered to St. Louis, where it was equipped as a four 20-pounder Parrott Gun Battery, and was immediately sent down the river to join General Grant’s command. The Battery arrived in Pittsburg Landing, April 5th, and participated in the battle of Shiloh the next day April 6th. The Battery formed the centre of that line of artillery, which with the gun-boats on the Tennessee River, repulsed the last charges of the Confederates on the first day of Shiloh. Soon after Battery H became part of General Sherman’s command, and was always thereafter attached to the Second Division of the 15th Corps.

At Memphis, during the summer of 1862, Captain Silversparre was made a Chief of Artillery at Fort Pickering, and in pursuance of his duties was captured by the enemy and never again rejoined the Battery. The command then devolved upon Frank DeGress, who some time afterwards was commissioned Captain, and who made the Battery (known as DeGress’ Battery) a very famous one in General Sherman’s command. The Battery participated in all of battles in which the 15th Corps were engaged, and was one of the working companies of that famous Corps at Vicksburg, Mission Ridge, Atlanta Campaign, March to the Sea and finally marched in review before the President at Washington, and was mustered out with the rest of 15th Corps.

With a vivid power point display accompanying, John’s presentation made an enjoyable and information packed evening. Huzzah!

PRESERVATION REPORT BY BRIAN CONROY

Greetings, everyone. I hope everyone is staying dry during this wet spring season we are having. This month's preservation opportunity is an extraordinary chance to further build on past successes of the Civil War Trust at the Shiloh battlefield in Tennessee and the South Mountain battlefield in Maryland. 73 key acres at these two 1862 battlefields can be preserved for just \$103,000. These two battlefields represent different theaters of the war, and while the Trust and other preservationists have already saved many acres of land at both of these battlefields, but development is a real and present threat that could compromise all the land that has been protected with hard work.

Shiloh: After the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson, Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston sought to surprise the Union army under General Ulysses S. Grant near the Shiloh Meeting House on the morning of April 6, 1862.

As gunfire erupted with the Confederate advance, Johnston announced to his staff, "Tonight, we will water our horses in the Tennessee River."

Johnston would not live to see sunset that day, bleeding to death at 2:30 pm on the battlefield after being shot in the leg. Still, his men made great advances against the Union line and by day's end many of the generals around Grant counseled retreat. Echoing words spoken by Johnston the previous day, Grant declared, "Retreat? No! I propose to attack at daylight, and whip them."

During the rainy night that followed, Federal reinforcements arrived, and Union gunboats relentlessly lobbed shells into the Confederate lines. When dawn broke on April 7, it was the Union army's turn to push the Southern soldiers back on their heels.

At the end of those two April days, nearly 24,000 casualties made Shiloh the bloodiest battle in all American history up to that point in time. No one experienced anything like it until that September, when the bloodiest single-day battle in all of American history would occur along the banks of Antietam Creek.

South Mountain: Three days before that fateful September 17th, Union General George B. McClellan was pursuing General Robert E. Lee's Confederates through the passes at South Mountain.

Several days prior, McClellan found a copy of Lee's campaign battle plans, Special Orders No. 191, and was roused to uncharacteristic aggression. Vowing, "if I cannot whip Bobbie Lee, I will be willing to go home," he pursued the scattered Confederate divisions to the three main passes through the South Mountain range, at Crampton's, Fox's, and Turner's Gaps.

The fight at Crampton's Gap was the most important of the three. Union General William Franklin took at least three hours deploying his 12,000-man force to attempt to dislodge a few hundred Confederate defenders. Eventually, the Federals gained control of all three passes, but stubborn Confederate resistance bought Lee precious time to begin the process of reuniting his army, setting the stage for the Battle of Antietam three days later.

UPCOMING CIVIL WAR EVENTS

MAY 16, 2019

SOUTH SUBURBAN CWRT

Illinois Regiments at Gettysburg”

Speaker: Dennis Doyle

Smokey Barque, Frankfort, IL

www.southsuburbancwrt.com

MAY 21, 2019

LINCOLN-DAVIS CWRT

“Battles of Nathan Bedford Forrest”

Speaker: John Scales

Country House Restaurant, Alsip, IL

lincolndavisroundtable@yahoo.com

JUNE 7, 2019

NORTHERN ILLINOIS CWRT

Annual Banquet

Leslie Goddard as Louisa May Alcott

www.northernilcwrt.com

JUNE 11, 2019

McHENRY COUNTY CWRT

“Leeds Cannon at the Boone County History Museum”

Speaker: Frank Crawford

Woodstock Public Library

www.mchenrycivilwar.com

JUNE 14, 2019

CHICAGO CWRT

“Elmer Ellsworth & His Zouaves”

Speaker: Doug Dammann

Holiday Inn O'Hare

5615 N. Cumberland, Chicago

dinnerreservation@chicagocwrt.org

JUNE 18, 2019

LINCOLN/DAVIS CWRT

“Union Soldiers in the Civil War”

Speaker: Lance Herdegen

Country House Restaurant, Alsip, IL.

lincolndavisroundtable@yahoo.com

If you need assistance parking during construction Please Ask at the front desk or call 630-401-6699. There are plenty of parking spaces available.

ALL FOR THE UNION

The SCCWRT website is back.

Brian Conroy has taken over the SCCWRT Facebook Page.

Thanks to Rick Zarr, Roger Bohn, Bruce Allardice, Rob Girardi, Mike Miller, Cindy Heckler, Mike & Sandy Moosman, John Beale and Jan Rasmussen for their help at the Civil War Show on April 27th.

BACK IN HISTORY

50 Years Ago: Don Sikorski presented: “Stuart’s Chambersburg Ride”

25 Years Ago: Ron Bass presented: “Sherman’s March to the Sea”

10 Years Ago: Len & Mary Fran Overcash presented: “A Brief History of the 45th Mississippi Regiment”

FUTURE SCCWRT MEETINGS

June 21, 2019 Annual Banquet
“From Unwanted to Indispensable:
The Real Nurses of the Civil War”
Speaker: Pamela Toler

September 20, 2019
“A Family and Nation Under Fire”
Speaker: Georgiann Baldino

THE SALT CREEK CWRT

www.saltcreekcwrt.org

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