March 18th Meeting

This month we welcome Earl Allen of Bridgewater, NY. He represents the Homer Searle Camp #114, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. Earl was the 1st Camp Commander of the Searle Camp. He is a member of the Dan Butterfield CWRT and volunteer at the Oneida County Historical Society having been chosen Volunteer of the Year. He currently is Vice President of the Oneida County Historical Association and was also honored as Oneida County Historian of the Year a few years ago.

His topic will be **Union Civil War Veterans’ Associations** with an emphasis on The Grand Army of the Republic. The GAR was founded in 1866 as a fraternal organization for honorably discharged veterans of the Union Army, Navy, and the Marine Corps who had served between April 12, 1861 and April 9, 1965. By 1890 the organization grew to over 400,000 strong and emerged as a powerful political force active in pension reform for veterans, relief work, and the establishment of soldiers’ homes. Five members were elected President of the United States, and for a time, it was impossible to be nominated on the Republican ticket without the endorsement of the GAR voting block.

The GAR encouraged the formation of Allied Orders to aid them in its various works finally endorsing the Sons of Veterans of the Civil War as its heir. The final Encampment of the GAR was held in Indianapolis in 1949 and the last member, Albert Woolson, died in 1956 at the age of 109.

**A Posthumous Medal of Honor**

A local Delafield, Wisconsin historian began a campaign seven years ago to have a local boy who served in the Civil War awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for gallantry during the Battle of Gettysburg in which he was killed on July 3, 1863. Just last week the office of U.S. Sen. Feingold (D-Wisconsin) was notified by Secretary of Army John McHugh that Alonzo Cushing would receive the country’s highest military honor.

Cushing, born in Delafield Township on Jan 19, 1841, was raised in Fredonia, NY and was an 1861 graduate of West Point. At Gettysburg he was a 1st Lt. and commander of Battery A, 4th US Artillery. He ordered his guns down to the stone wall as Pickett’s infantry swarmed forward. Wounded three times during Pickett’s charge, he manned one of the guns himself before he fell.

The Army is seeking the nearest next of kin to Cushing before a date is set for the award ceremony. Alonzo Cushing is buried in the West Point Cemetery.

**Directions to the Town of DeWitt Community Room**

*From 481N take Exit 5W to Kirkville Rd West. Merge onto Kirkville Rd and travel 1.2 miles. Turn right onto Kinne St and travel 0.7 miles. Turn right at Sanders Creek Parkway and travel 0.2 miles to 148 Sanders Creek Parkway, the site of the East Syracuse Fire Department and the Town of DeWitt Community Room.*

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**Meeting Site**

**Town of DeWitt Community Room**

148 Sanders Creek Parkway  
East Syracuse, New York

**Earl Allen**  
*Union CW Veterans’ Associations*

**Thursday, March 18, 2010**  
**7:00 PM**

**Our 16th Year**

Meetings are held at 7 PM on the third Thursday of the month from September through June and are free and open to the public.
New Gettysburg Superintendent

Bob Kirby, a thirty-six year National Park Service veteran, became the new superintendent at Gettysburg National Military Park on March 1st. He replaces John Latschar who resigned under pressure last year. Previously, Kirby served as superintendent at Petersburg National Battlefield in Virginia for ten years. He called his new position “a tremendous challenge,” noting that Gettysburg is the most famous Civil War site in America.

Kirby served as assistant superintendent at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and chief of interpretation at Lowell, MA National Historic Park. He was an environmental protection specialist for the Defense Logistics Agency; outdoor recreation director with the Department of the Army in West Germany; and held several positions at Golden Gate National Recreation Area. He is the 11th permanent superintendent since the National Park Service took control of the Gettysburg Battlefield in 1863. Past superintendents are: James McDonaghie (1933-1941); J. Walter Coleman (1941-1945); James Meyers (1958-1963); Kittridge Wing (1963-1966); George Emery (1966-1970); Jerry Schober (1970-1974); John Earnst (1974-1988); Daniel Kuehn (1988-1989); Jose Cisneros (1990-1994); and John Latschar (1994-2010).

Albany Park Closure Rally

One of the attendees at the March 3rd Albany rally to protest Gov. Patterson’s potential closing of New York’s State Parks and Historic Sites was Naj Wikoff of Lake Placid. He’s concerned about the potential closing of the John Brown State Historic Site near Lake Placid. Wykoff says the site is too important to close.

“This is the 150th anniversary of John Brown’s death and we’re entering the 150th commemoration of the Civil War, which is really the seminal event of our country. It’s the event that really brought us together as a nation, and he forced the whole issue. The timing could not be worse,” Wikoff said. The John Brown Farm is one of 57 State Parks and Historic Sites targeted for closure because of the state’s budget crisis.

Popular Speaker at Dewitt Library

The Dewitt Community Library at Shoppingtown will feature Cheryl Pula, a librarian from the Utica area and a past speaker at our round table. She will present her view of the 3 days of battle at Gettysburg on Thurs, April 1 at 7 pm. Cheryl is a historian with many interests. She was awarded the 2006 Oneida County Historian of the Year. The room at the library holds 60 people. So to be sure of a seat, registration is encouraged.

Billy’s First Love? Maybe?

Was General William T. Sherman demonized in the South during and after his March to the Sea? Has the image of him as a beast and butcher become a southern legend? Will that image ever change? Probably not. However, an incident may have occurred in the Carterville/Etowah valley of Georgia that for some has eased his absolute monster image.

The story centers around Cecelia Stovall, a beautiful young girl whose father was a wealthy cotton merchant in Augusta. Cecelia visited West Point in 1836 to see her brother, Marcellus Stovall, Sherman’s roommate. At a dance held on that visit, Sherman made her acquaintance. It is said that she told the young Sherman upon his advances that “Your eyes are so cold and cruel. I pity the man who ever becomes your foe. Ah, how you would crush an enemy.” (see photo below for “the look”) To this, Sherman replied, “Even though you were my enemy, my dear, I would ever love and protect you.” Years later, Cecelia married Charles T. Shelman who built Cecelia a beautiful white house on a hill above the Etowah River. That is where the two lived when the Civil War began in 1861. Charles left the mansion to serve as a captain in the Confederate Army, and Cecelia eventually left the mansion to escape the invading Union army.

As fate would have it, General Sherman came to the mansion on his way through the area in 1864. His attention was brought to the fine stately home high above the river. When he arrived there, he found that the family had left, and they had placed the home and its grounds in the care of an African American servant who exclaimed that he was glad Miss Cecelia was not there to see the sight of her lovely home being swarmed by Yankee soldiers. When Sherman learned that Miss Cecelia was indeed the Cecelia from his past, he ordered everything that had been taken from the home put back and stationed guards at the house until his entire army had passed. He also left a message, which is still in the family records of the Stovall/Shelman families. The message read: “You once said that I would crush an enemy and you pitied my foe. So you recall my reply? Although many years have passed my answer is the same, I would ever shield and protect you.” That I have done. Forgive all else. I am only a soldier.”

Charles and Cecelia returned to their home after the war. Charles lived there until his death in 1886 and she until hers in 1904. Shelman Heights later burned to the ground on New Year’s day in 1911. Both were aware that they had once been absent when perhaps their most famous visitor paid a call.

Massive Tree Planting

The Journey Through Hallowed Ground project which follows Old U.S. Route 15 from Gettysburg to Monticello in Charlottesville, VA and documents the historically rich area that includes the largest collection of CW battlefields in the country is planning a massive tree planting project as part of the organization’s observation of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. The program will plant 600,000 trees, one every 10 feet along the scenic byway, to commemorate every soldier killed in the American Civil War.
Racial Discrimination in Union Pensions

Twenty years after the Civil War ended, the 179,000 US Colored Troops of the Union Army saw racial inequality widen as the Pension Bureau left most of them out of a rapid expansion. According to a new Brigham Young University study, the program shifted away from its relatively color-blind roots when it began granting disability claims based on chronic illness to soldiers who had not been wounded in the war. During the 1880’s, the Pension Bureau approved applications from uninjured white veterans at more than twice the rate of approval for uninjured black veterans. “Black veterans were far less successful than whites for conditions that were hard to verify and required a degree of trust,” said Sven Wilson, an associate professor of political science at BYU.

The research draws from a large Union Army data set collected by BYU students at the National Archives in Washington, DC. Typically it took a student one hour to locate and record a single soldier’s military, pension, medical and census records. Wilson’s new study is one of the first to explore the experiences of black veterans.

During Reconstruction, the Pension Bureau awarded monthly disability payments only to veterans disabled by war injuries. To weed out fraudulent claims, the Bureau required applicants to produce documents like birth certificates, military papers and hospital records. For many black veterans, three-fourths of whom were former slaves, such records simply didn’t exist. Since the Union Army had a hard time staffing hospitals of black regiments, ailing black soldiers were not sent to the hospital as often as white soldiers and didn’t have a paper trail of illness or injury. As a result they had a harder time applying for a pension. An enrollment gap emerged, with wounded white veterans getting pensions at twice the rate or wounded black vets.

The silver lining during this period was that blacks who met the application requirements fared about as well as whites. Between 1865 and 1878, the Pension Bureau approved 83% of the applications submitted by wounded white veterans and 77% submitted by wounded black vets.

“The fact that the Pension Bureau gave it to both blacks and whites was an accomplishment for the time,” Wilson said. “The pension was a tremendous financial boon for black families in a time when the economic opportunities of African-Americans were severely limited by Jim Crow policies.”

Ballooning bureaucracy left black vets behind during the 1880’s as political pressure changed how the Pension Bureau operated. Review boards became more lenient about linking veterans’ various conditions to the war. Veterans awarded new claims also became eligible for back payment.

Racial inequality widened as the program expanded because black veterans’ claims were believed far less readily than whites, especially if the disability was hard to verify medically. Wilson’s study shows that a claim of chronic back pain, for example, was twice as likely to be approved for a white veteran. Applicants with highly verifiable ailments such as varicose veins, on the other hand, had roughly the same chances regardless of race.

Second chance came too late for most. Twenty-five years after the war ended, a new law dropped the requirement that the disability must trace back to the war. The new rule required only proof of service and a current disability or chronic illness. Black veterans began to benefit from the pension program though most did not live to the turn of the century when the program peaked in terms of equal treatment.

Onondaga County Civil War Round Table
New Member/Renewal Form

*Membership dues of the OCCWRT are:

Please Check one of the Following

____ $20.00 a year
____ O.H.A. members $12.00
____ Seniors and Students $16.00
____ Family rate (2 or more) $30.00

Dues may be paid at meetings or sent to:
Onondaga County Civil War Round Table
ATTN: A. Scott Cauger Treasurer
216 Windebank Lane
Minoa, NY 13116

Please find $__________enclosed in form of
Circle One:

Check       M.O.       Cash

E-Mail______________________________

Please check if you prefer an emailed newsletter and can receive an Acrobat (pdf) file.

Date _____________________

* Dues will be pro-rated for new members who join at various times during the fiscal year.

The Onondaga County Civil War Round Table was organized in 1994 and is now an incorporated non-profit educational organization. Meetings are held on the third Thursday of the month from September through June. The purpose of the OCCWRT is to stimulate and encourage interest in the American Civil War, to assist in community service in order to enhance the study and understanding of the Civil War, to provide educational and historical research of the period, and to promote historic preservation.