



November 2009
Volume 16 Number 3

The Battlefield

Newsletter of the Onondaga County Civil War Round Table

November 19th Meeting

2009-10 OCCWRT Officers

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Meeting Site

Town of DeWitt Community Room

148 Sanders Creek Parkway
East Syracuse, New York

Willis Platt

presents

1863 Grierson's Raid

Thursday, November 19,, 2009

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.

Willis Platt will present the low down on the best known Western cavalry raid of the Civil War. The time is April 1863. General Grant needs help at Vicksburg. To divert CSA General Pemberton's attention from Grant's crossing of the Mississippi south of Vicksburg, Grant asks Col. Benjamin H. Grierson (1826-1911) to lead his 1st Division Cavalry from the XVI Corps - all 1700 men-on a series of raids to baffle and deceive Pemberton. And that's exactly what Grierson did beginning from LaGrange, TN to Baton Rouge, LA covering more than 600 miles in 16 days. Grant said of the raid, "It has been one of the most brilliant cavalry exploits of the war, and will be handed down in history as an example to be imitated." Col. Grierson was known thereafter as Brigadier General Grierson. For the third time in the past year we will travel to a Western Campaign.

Will is a member of the Binghamton CWRT and the editor of its newsletter. He enjoys the study of history, though he spent 36 years as an engineer before he could devote full-time to history. Now he is presently researching material for three books: one on the 16th Independent Light Artillery which was formed in Binghamton and two on the Olympics - his other interest. For you see, Will is a shooter. In 1975 he represented the USA at the Montreal Games and the pre-games to the 1976 Olympic Games. He was the Team Manager for shooting in the 1992 Barcelona Games and helped conduct the shooting competition at the 84, 96, and 2000 Games. What a lucky fellow he is for he is guided by not one but two passions that make him a busy and happy man. Come and meet Willis Platt and Benjamin Grierson on the 19th.

October Meeting

Thanks to Bill Burak for his revealing portraits of Nathan Bedford Forrest and Joshua Chamberlain, two men whose inner strengths and firm beliefs piloted their success as leaders in the Civil War, leaders without prior military training. Bill applied a R.W. Emerson quote to these two remarkable men:

*Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an action and you reap a habit;
sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.*

We delighted as the raconteur in Bill examined the lives of Forrest and Chamberlain interspersed with tidbits of his own equally intriguing journey to his destiny as a teacher of history. Bill has found his focus and we rejoiced with his success. Thanks, Bill.

John Latscher Reassigned

After a 15 year stint as superintendent of the Gettysburg National Military Park, Dr. John Latscher has been reassigned to a desk job with the National Park Service in Frederick, Maryland. The reassignment followed a leak of a federal document citing him for using his government computer to view inappropriate material. An interim superintendent will be named shortly. Dr. Latscher became a polarizing figure as his ideas for change at the battlefield emerged primarily in the form of a new privately financed Visitor's Center.

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.

Everett Emotes Elaborately

Wednesday, November 19, 1863: It was the day of dedication for the new National Military Cemetery at Gettysburg. As was expected on such a solemn occasion, the greatest orator of the day, Edward Everett, was engaged to speak. He delivered a brilliant performance, declaiming for two hours on the history of war from ancient times to now. After he was done, the President of the United States rose to the podium. His voice, often described as thin and reedy, was not a match for Everett's. Some in the crowd, unable to hear, pushed forward, or complained that Lincoln should speak louder. About the time they got within earshot, Lincoln sat down again. Newspaper reviews the next day were mixed. Lincoln, who had left a gravely ill child and very nervous wife back in Washington, and who was not feeling very well himself, headed at once for the train station and home.

from Civil War Interactive

Recent OCCWRT Board Decisions

At the October 8th Board Meeting important decisions regarding our fiscal year and the payment of dues were made that our members need to know and understand. What follows is a summary of the four new resolutions.

1. **Fiscal Year:** To synchronize its fiscal year with its tax filing date, beginning in January 2010 the fiscal year for the OCCWRT will begin in January and end on December 31.

2. **Dues Changes:** In order to administrate a quarterly pro-rata dues program (described in #3), the board made minor adjustments to the dues schedule for 2010.. Family \$20, Senior and Student \$16, and OHA members \$12.

3. **Dues Proration:** Under our current policy, new members pay the same rate whether they join in the first month of the new fiscal year (now September,) or the last month of the fiscal year (now June). The Board decided that in 2010, dues should be pro-rated for new members who join at various times during the fiscal year. For instance, a new individual member who joins in the first quarter now pays \$20. If he joins in the second quarter, he will pay \$15; in the 3rd quarter \$10 and in the fourth quarter \$5. These pro-rated rates apply to new members only and apply to all three dues categories. The increase in dues will apply to everyone joining in 2010. If you have already paid your dues, those dues are good through December 2010.

4. **Savings Account:** The treasurer has opened an Alliance Bank Savings Account to hold long term funds which in the past gained no interest in the organization's checking account.

Homer Historic Marker

Homer town officials gathered in the village on September 24th at 5 Albany St. to dedicate an historic marker to William Osborn Stoddard (1835-1925), an assistant personal secretary to President Lincoln. Stoddard along with Francis Carpenter, the Homer artist who painted the *The First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation before the Cabinet*, and Homerian Eli Devoe, a private detective who revealed to Lincoln the plot to assassinate him along his inaugural route to Washington, were featured in the town's Lincoln Bicentennial Weekend this past May. Congratulations to town Historian Martin Sweeney for this appropriate finish to the village's celebration of its links to the Lincoln presidency in this Bicentennial year.

The Hero History Forgot

by Joe Balckstock of *ContraCosta Times.com*

There are no monuments or statues honoring George Foster Robinson, and you'll rarely find him mentioned in even the most detailed history book. But on one dark day in the nation's history, he was an American hero.

Robinson, who spent his last years in Pomona, CA, was thrust into the limelight on the night of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Robinson wasn't at Ford's Theater on the night of April 14, 1865, when John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln. A few blocks away, he fought off another assassin trying to kill Secretary of State William Seward as part of a conspiracy to bring the government to its knees.

A 32-year-old Union sergeant, Robinson was recovering from wounds when he was temporarily assigned as an attendant to Seward. Seward was bedridden because of injuries received when his carriage overturned 10 days before.



courtesy arlingtoncemetery.com

Lewis Payne, a Booth co-conspirator, burst into Seward's home about 10 p.m. Robinson struggled with Payne before being struck in the head with the handle of Payne's large knife. Stunned and bleeding, Robinson rose up and jumped on the assassin who was stabbing Seward. After a struggle in which Robinson was cut in the back, Payne escaped. Robinson and Seward's daughter then managed to stem the flow of blood from the secretary's wounds. Both Seward and Robinson recovered from their wounds.

For those few moments on April 14th, the spotlight was turned on the previously undistinguished Robinson. Born in tiny Hartford, Maine, he had been educated at two colleges before returning to work in his father's farming and lumber interests near Island Falls in northern Maine. Midway through the Civil War, Robinson enlisted in Company B of the 8th Maine Volunteer Infantry.

On May 20, 1864 he was wounded in the knee at the Battle of Petersburg, and spent much of the next year in Washington-area hospitals before being assigned as Seward's aide. His heroics did not go unrewarded. He became a clerk in the War Department, until the Maine Legislature petitioned Congress asking their favorite son be honored in a more appropriate way. In 1871, Robinson was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the same national award given notables from Thomas Edison to Rosa Parks to Tony Blair. In addition to awarding him the specially crafted \$2,000 gold medal commemorating his heroic conduct (seen above), the House of Representative voted to give him \$5,000.

As a bonus, he was promoted to major and appointed paymaster of the Army. While serving in that capacity, Robinson first visited Southern California. In 1896, he bought 20 acres of orange trees on the east side of today's Towne Avenue in Pomona, a ranch his son Edmund operated. In 1896, Robinson retired from the military. He died of pneumonia at 75 in 1907. Both he and his wife, who died in 1922, are buried at Arlington National Cemetery just a few yards from the burial site of JFK.

In 1965, on the centennial of the attacks on Lindoln and Seward, Congress named Mount Sergeant Robinson, a 10,415-foot peak about 90 miles northeast of Anchorage, Alaska. The selection of a mountain there was in part because Seward, two years after Robinson saved his life, brokered the purchase of Alaska from Russia. Also in 1965, the Maine Civil War Centennial Commission renamed May Mountain near Island Falls as Robinson Mountain.



But despite these honors, Robinson remains almost anonymous as neither his birthplace in Maine nor his final hometown of Pomona have any marker or remembrance of his heroic actions. For George Foster Robinson, a national hero with a gold medal and his name on two mountains, fame has been very fleeting.

Another Eviction in Statuary Hall

Congressman, lawyer, educator, diplomat and officer in the Confederate Army during the Civil War, Jabez Curry (1825-1903) has stood in Statuary Hall in Congress since 1908 representing the state of Alabama. Recently his likeness was moved to Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.

For those who have read or seen *The Miracle Worker*, it's an indelible and inspiring moment when deaf and blind Alabama-born Helen Keller, under the guidance of her teacher Anne Sullivan, successfully spells out in sign language the word "water" while at a water pump. That's the moment captured in a new bronze statue unveiled recently at the Capitol which replaces Jabez Curry, a lieutenant colonel on CSA General Johnston's staff during the CW.

The Apple Fell Far From the Tree

Captain Hubert Dilger (1836-1911) a German immigrant is remembered as a one of the best if not the best artilleryman in the Army of the Potomac. He led Battery 1, 1st Ohio Light Artillery, of the 11th Corps. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions at Chancellorsville. His citation reads as follows: *Fought his guns until the enemy were upon him, then with one gun hauled in the road by hand he formed the rear guard and kept the enemy at bay by the rapidity of his fire and was the last man in the retreat.* On July 1st at Gettysburg, Dilger's Battery fired fast, accurately and furiously from what is now the Gettysburg College athletic fields to Oak Hill as Ewell's corps advanced upon the Union line north of the railroad cut.

However Dilger's son, Anton Casimir Dilger (1884-1918), is not remembered as kindly. Schooled in Germany from the age of 9, Anton became a German physician and surgeon. By the time WWI began, he returned to the US with cultures of anthrax and glanders with the intention of biological sabotage on behalf of the German government. Germany stopped their biological warfare against the US in 1916 after which Anton returned to Germany. Upon his return to America, Dilger found himself under suspicion of being a German agent by the FBI and fled to Mexico and then Spain where ironically he became a victim of the Spanish flu pandemic.

Thank You For Your Dues - Good Through Dec. 2010

Dues paid through October 2009: Gerry Allen, Florence Baur, Lisa Bradley, Bill Burak, Mike Carpenter, A. Scott Cauger, Mrs. Reginald Chester (twice), the Conrad Family, Dave Cuculich, Gordon Cruickshank, Darothy DeAngelo, Frank & July De Grenier, Nancy Edwards, the David Federle Family, the Frieda Evans Family, Joy Gillis, Bill Goodwin, Lamont Hahn, Ruth Hotaling, Ted Jones, Marty Joyce, Jim Kellogg, Mike Murphy, Steve Nathan, Ed Raus, Kathy Ryan, Charles Snyder, M. Kent Russell, Richard Scott, Pat Stepanek, Eleanor Tyler, James Tyler, Elaine Tucker, and Fred Wyker.

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 \$10.00

_____ Seniors and Students \$15.00

_____ 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

Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

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

E-Mail _____

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.



Onondaga County
Civil War Round Table PO Box 175 Tully, NY 13159-0175