



October 2009
Volume 16 Number 2

The Battlefield

Newsletter of the Onondaga County Civil War Round Table

October 15th Meeting

There is a professor amongst us, and he has agreed to be our speaker this month. Bill Burak has taught history at Onondaga Community College and now teaches at Columbia College, extension campus, located at Hancock Field, 174th Air National Guard Base. He teaches both American History and Western Civilization. He has been a member of our round table for 3 years.

While studying for his Masters Degree at SUNY Cortland, he was attracted to the concept of the Citizen Soldier, a concept that still defines America. During his study of the American Civil War, he became acquainted with both Joshua Chamberlain and Nathan Bedford Forest, two of the more extraordinary Citizen Soldiers. In a seminar paper titled *Uncommon Road to Glory*, he told the story of these two men, neither having received any sanctioned military training, yet both reaching the lofty height of Brigadier General. He will chronicle their incredible stories when we next meet. Enjoy an evening with Bill, Joshua, and Nathan.

Upcoming Events in Peterboro

The Smithfield Community Association of Peterboro, NY, stewards for the Gerrit Smith Estate, a National Historic Landmark, have two Sunday programs planned for October. On Sunday, October 11 at 2 pm, Dr. Norman Dann will speak about Gerrit Smith, John Brown and the 150th Anniversary of the raid at Harpers Ferry which occurred on Oct. 16, 1859. On Sunday October 25 at 10 am, Dr. Dann will lead a tour of the Gerrit Smith Estate for the National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum. Dr. Dann, a past speaker to the round table, is the author of *Practical Dreamer: Gerrit Smith and the Crusade for Social Reform*, the most recent biography of Smith. Both programs will meet at the Smithfield Community Center, 5255 Pleasant Valley Road, Peterboro. There is an admission cost of \$2.00 per program.

September's Meeting

Thanks to Jason Emerson, an independent historian and author from Cazenovia, NY, for the rich detail of Mary Lincoln's madness, the insight into Abe's technical genius, and the misunderstood motives of Robert Lincoln's decision to confine his mother. We eagerly await his biography of Robert which should be available in 2011. At that time we will again invite this engaging scholar to our round table. Thanks also to our large audience who had numerous questions for Jason which he answered with precision and eloquence.

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.

2009-10 OCCWRT Officers

Bill Goodwin, President/Program Co-Chair
315 437-3887

Diane Haller, VP/ Program Co-Chair
315 656-7059
greenfieldsdh@yahoo.com

Dave Osborn, Secretary
315 446-1715

A. Scott Cauger, Treasurer
315 627-0232
ascott.cauger@us.ngrid.com

Kathy Ryan, Trustee
315 251-5889
kathleenryan1000@earthlink.net

Mike Carpenter, Trustee
315 420 5299
amandamatt8890@yahoo.com

Darothy DeAngelo, Archivist
315 682-6312
darothy_d@hotmail.com (2 underlines)

Pat Stepanek, Newsletter Editor
315 696-5531
pas1865@verizon.net

Meeting Site

Town of DeWitt Community Room

148 Sanders Creek Parkway
East Syracuse, New York

Bill Burak

Uncommon Road to Glory
Two Extraordinary Citizen Soldiers

Thursday, October 15, 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.

Do You Have Any “Blue Pills”?

The daily *Telegram* of the UK recently announced that the British Royal Society of Chemistry is offering a reward to anyone who might have a few 19th century blue pills, aka Blue Mass, in their attics or medicine cabinets. This Victorian medication was used widely in the 19th century as a cure for many infirmities such as constipation, child birth pains, tuberculosis and toothaches. The main ingredient was a combination of toxic mercury, glycerol, rose honey and althea.

The Royal Society of Chemistry historical group said that various routes were used to administer the drug such as skin absorption, vapour inhalation, injections of ‘grey oil (mercury dispersed in lanolin and liquid paraffin), and by mouth (the blue pills) consisting of a suspension of the metal in liquorice- all with little positive effect.

In this Lincoln Bicentennial year, Lincoln’s life has been examined in its every detail. Now his consumption of the blue pill is under scrutiny by the British Royal Society of Chemistry. Lincoln’s consumption of the blue mass during the 1850s either caused his melancholy or was used as a treatment for the melancholy. Lincoln, by nature stable and friendly, would display bizarre behavior, often ending in ‘towering rages.’ Aware of the effect the ‘blue mass’ had on him, Lincoln chose to abandon the pills as he declared they “made him cross.” A good decision. As president in the midst of a civil war, Lincoln was known for his reliability in withstanding the pressures and stress of his office.

The Map That Won’t Go Away

For those who remember the centerpiece of the old Gettysburg visitor center, the Electric Map, and witnessed troop movements as they arrived on the battlefield with colored lights flashing across a topographically accurate surface, the destruction of this low-tech behemoth for the new visitor center has caused outcries of grief for the past. Created in 1963 for the 100th anniversary of the battle, the map attracted millions of visitors to one of the twelve-30 minute presentations daily. Visitors paid a low fee to orient themselves to the battlefield before they ventured out on their own. The Monocacy battlefield still uses such a map to depict fighting and troop movement.

Unknowing visitors still show up at the Gettysburg visitor center asking for the map which now sits in four pieces in storage. The Park Service offered it free to any taker who had the space to display it. No takers yet.

Before it was dismantled the Park Service filmed one more showing of the map complete with lights and narrative. Their idea now is to orient visitors to Gettysburg history and give them an alternative to viewing the museum’s current film, *A New Birth of Freedom*. There will always be those who won’t be satisfied until the map is brought back, but for the rest of us who long for the nostalgia of years past, the Electric Map movie will fit the bill.

Ed Bearss in Bronze

Vicksburg National Military Park recently unveiled a bust of Ed Bearss, legendary battlefield guide and retired historian for the National Park Service. Terry Winschel, Vicksburg Park historian, calls Bearss “the Pied Piper of History for his crowd-pleasing ability to get folks lined up to learn about the past.” At the Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College, he is often referred to as ‘the walking, talking Official Records of the CW.’ The bust honors Ed’s successful effort to raise the USS Cairo, a Civil War-era city class Union ironclad gunboat named for cities along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, sunk by a Confederate mine in Dec. 1862 as it attempted to run up the Yazoo River to clear the channel and attack Confederate batteries on shore.

Ed along with two others pinpointed the site of the Cairo in 1956. Then serving as Vicksburg’s park historian, Ed was instrumental in the salvage operations that brought up the Cairo in 1965. Its restoration was funded by Congress over the next several years. The gunboat was accepted into the National Park Service in 1972. About 300,000 visitors view the Cairo each year, Winschel said.

The unveiling capped off a week-long tour Ed led of the Vicksburg Campaign, starting in Memphis and following the route taken by Union forces in capturing Vicksburg in 1862 and 1863. May he keep going another 85 years.



Ed Bearss aboard the USS Cairo standing next to a bust in his honor.

NH Bans the Sale of Human Remains

New Hampshire officials have banned the sale of human remains and items buried with a person after an auction house put the skeletal remains of a CW soldier up for sale. Earlier this month, NH officials changed the law that allowed human remains and grave goods to be sold on the open market in the state. Human remains include not only the remains of the person, but also jewelry, clothing, memorabilia and other personal items that were buried with a person. Medical specimens have been and still are exempted from the law. Archeologists and Native Americans have been concerned with the traffic in human remains and grave goods because it has been viewed both as a desecration and as a threat to the state’s heritage.

The issue came into focus in October 2005 when an auction house in New Hampshire wanted to sell the skeletal remains and grave goods of a Civil War casualty. The person was a member of a New York regiment and was buried at Haxall's Landing in Virginia, probably during the Union retreat from Malvern Hill. Illegally excavated, the skeletal remains and grave goods - weapons, bullets, belt buckles and personal effects - were offered for auction from the estate of a Civil War relic collector.

The Sons of Union Veterans contacted state archaeologist Dr. Richard Bolsvert in order to stop the sale. Because the excavation of the grave and transportation of the remains and grave goods were illegal, their sale was halted and eventually the remains were returned to New York for reinterment. Enforcement of the new law hinges on education of auctioneers and antiquities dealers, officials said. If a violation is suspected, the relevant county attorney should be notified, along with Dr. Boisvert at the NH Division of Historical Resources

from TheBostonChannel.com, Sept. 24, 2009

Civil War Turmoil

Other than the Civil War, the largest civil insurrection in U.S. history were the New York Draft Riots of 1863. By early 1863, the Union army was in dire need of additional recruits. The addition of Black soldiers to northern regiments did not bring the northern army up to expected strength. Congress' answer to the shortage was the Conscription Act of March 1863, the first draft in U.S. history. All men between the ages of 20 and 45 were enrolled in the draft lottery, except those who could afford \$300 to pay for a substitute. Of course, the rich benefitted from this exemption clause.

New York City was hot in July 1863, both in temperature and the city's long simmering class conflicts. German and Irish immigrants were resistant to the draft as they pursued fresh lives in their new homeland. In addition, competition for jobs between the white immigrants and free blacks raised tensions to a breaking point.

On July 11, 1863, the first names of the new draft were drawn without incident. Two days later, the response was quite different. German and Irish immigrants banded together and began to march in a protest that turned violent. Draft buildings were burned, the rolls of names destroyed, and institutions and persons associated with the enforcement of the conscription law were targeted. Anger against the draft law transformed into bloody and violent confrontation between the city's clashing classes. Blacks in particular received the brunt of the violence. The Irish were viewed as the perpetrators of most of the death and destruction.

The riots came to an end when the draft was suspended and military forces - some from the fields of Gettysburg - were brought in to control the mobs. Some historians have attributed the riots to agents from the South in an attempt to sabotage the efforts of the Northern draft. Others assign blame to a confluence of simmering cultural and political issues *from NewsInHistory.com*

Thank You for Your Dues

Dues paid at the September 2009 meeting: Gerry Allen, Florence Baur, Mike Carpenter, A. Scott Cauger, Mrs. Reginald Chester, the Conrad Family, Frank & July De Grenier, 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, Kathy Ryan, M. Kent Russell, Pat Stepanek, Eleanor Tyler, James Tyler, 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