



September 2009
Volume 16 Number 1

The Battlefield

Newsletter of the Onondaga County Civil War Round Table

Welcome Back

Our 16th year begins with our September meeting. Our president has another year planned with an eclectic mix of speakers. Of course, January is reserved for another round of Civil War Jeopardy. Hope you all will look forward to our new season and to again seeing both old and new faces in the coming months.

Thanks and congratulations to our new trustees, Kathy Ryan and Mike Carpenter, for taking on this leadership position. We are grateful to our outgoing trustees, Sue Greenhagen and Elaine Tucker, for their service to the round table. Since our by-laws specify a two-year limit for all board members, the June 2010 elections will find vacancies for president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. Please consider running for one of the vacancies.

We have been without an official publicity chairman for many years. If you feel you can help with publicity, let any officer or chair mentioned in the column on the left of this page know of your interest. Our program co-chairs, Bill Goodwin and Diane Haller, are always open to suggestions for future programs.

Lastly, dues for the 2009-10 season will be collected at each meeting or may be mailed to our treasurer, Scott Cauger, using the membership form within each newsletter. There has been no increase in dues; however, if you receive the newsletter by mail and have recently begun to receive email, let our newsletter editor know your new email address. Postage rates, as you know, are ridiculous. We will continue to send the newsletter to members who must receive a paper copy.

September 17th Meeting

Jason Emerson, author and historian now living in Cazenovia, will open the 16th season of our round table. With the release in September 2007 of *The Madness of Mary Lincoln*, and the January 2009 release of *Lincoln the Inventor* and the Lincoln Bicentennial, Jason has been a busy man this past year with speaking engagements at the National Archives, the Smithsonian, Gettysburg College Civil War Institute, Hildine, the Lincoln Family Home, the Lincoln Forum, the Illinois State Historical Society, and Homer's Lincoln Bicentennial weekend this past May to name just a few of his appearances. He has published numerous articles and book reviews that have appeared in both scholarly and popular publications such as *American Heritage*, *Civil War Times*, *US News & World Report*, and *the Lincoln Herald*.

The *Madness of Mary Lincoln* reexamines her insanity trial based on twenty "lost" letters Mary wrote while confined to an asylum. Her son Robert had made the decision to confine his mother for her own safety. Historians had been looking for these letters for eighty years. Jason found them and has written a compelling story of Mary's tortured life after her husband's assassination including her strained relations with Robert.

Lincoln the Inventor focuses on a long-neglected and little known aspect of Lincoln's life: his passion for science and technology. This fresh insight into his intellectual curiosity not only examines his patent for a device to buoy vessels over shoals, but also helps us to understand how his intellectual multitasking contributed to his greatness. This book will be available at the meeting for Jason to sign.

Currently Jason is working on a much-needed biography of Robert Todd Lincoln and will give us some insights into his research into Lincoln's much maligned oldest son. Join us for an evening with Abe, Mary and Robert Lincoln.

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

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Meeting Site

Town of DeWitt
Community Room

148 Sanders Creek Parkway
East Syracuse, New York

Jason Emerson

*The Lincolns:
Abe, Mary, and Robert*

Thursday, September 17, 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.

Your Daily Dose of Gettysburg History

For those who wish to spend more time at Gettysburg wandering the battlefield, or wish to keep in touch with what is currently happening in Gettysburg or would like to tour the field with a licensed battlefield guide, you can do so daily while remaining at home. Since February 2008 Bobby Housch, a licensed battlefield guide and an 8th-grade history teacher, has posted daily photos and video tours from the battlefield to his web site at www.gettysburgdaily.com. This is an educational and informative site that brings Gettysburg to millions of people.

Tour Culp's Hill with Dr. Charlie Fennell, discover rock carving with guide Tim Smith, cringe at the sloppy repaving of park roads, and watch the demolition of the old Visitor Center. Follow JFK's tour of the battlefield in the 60's, or learn the differences between the various artillery pieces on the field with guide George Newton. Seven days a week you'll find something new. The daily postings are all archived and easily accessible by category or date. **Warning - this site is addictive.** You will need a high speed internet connection to view and hear the videos. This site may inspire you to upgrade your computer.

John Brown's Pikes



The spears that John Brown ordered for his abolitionist army were fearsome, primitive things. Nearly seven feet long, the pikes had 10-inch steel blades made for slashing and impaling those who resisted the slave rebellion Brown envisioned. But the uprising didn't come, and the nearly 1,000 pikes Brown purchased from a Connecticut blacksmith and stockpiled at a Maryland farm a few miles from the US arsenal at Harpers Ferry, W.Va. were never used for their intended purpose. Instead, after Brown's ill-fated raid on the arsenal on Oct. 16, 1859, many pikes were seized as souvenirs and today command high prices. One bearing the serial number 846 sold in 2007 for \$13,000.

Brown's capture and execution for treason foiled his plan to hand out pikes to freed slaves and ignited passions on both sides of the slavery divide. Northern abolitionists considered him a martyr; secessionists from the South raised the John Brown pikes as symbols of Northern aggression in the days before the Civil War. Slave revolts were feared in the South.

Virginian Edmund Ruffin, a pro-slavery extremist, acquired a number of pikes from the superintendent of the federal arsenal and had them sent to the governors of the slave-holding states. To the handle of each pike, Ruffin pasted a label: "Sample of the favors designed for us by our Northern Brethren." He asked that the weapons be conspicuously displayed, preferably at the statehouse. The historical record is hazy on whether any pikes were showcased. But Ruffin caused a stir by writing an editorial in the Richmond *Examiner* promoting his idea.

Ruffin also carried a pike with him to Washington to garner support for his idea. It became a huge media event: 'Come see the John Brown pike.' His wish was to create fear and terror of slave insurrection. According to the Dennis Frye, chief historian at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, the anxiety whipped up by secessionists like Ruffin accelerated the formation of Southern militias and helped the Confederacy grow strong enough to defeat Union forces in the war's first battle at Fort Sumter, SC. Ruffin was there and is credited with firing the first shot. (He committed suicide in June '65 because he was unwilling to live under the US government.)

Surviving pike are rarities. Some were deliberately broken and used as knives or burned or destroyed. Institutions with at least one intact pike - two is a lot - include Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, the Smithsonian, the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, and the Kansas Museum of History. Brown has led armed attacks against pro-slavery groups in Kansas before moving east.

from the *San Antonio Express-News*

FYI and January Jeopardy

From 1861 to 1865 mills owned and operated by the DuPont family produced gunpowder for the Federal government valued at \$6,861,922.

Shortly before the Electric Map was permanently closed in April 2008 and cut into four large pieces for storage purposes, former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld visited Gettysburg to see the Electric Map one last time.

General Stonewall Jackson's horse, Little Sorrel, General Phil Sheridan's Rienze, and Joshua Chamberlain's Charlemagne were Morgan horses chosen for their amazing endurance under harsh conditions and their ability to thrive on less feed than many other breeds. Morgans were in high demand during the Civil War.

History on Your Cell Phone

The National Park Service offers a variety of formats for the tourist to learn history while visiting a national park or battlefield. Choices range from licensed tour or battlefield guides to cassette tapes and audio CDs to maps and brochures. Now at the Vicksburg National Military Park history is just a cell call away.

A partnership between the park and OnCell Systems, Inc. from Pittsford, NY has added this dimension to tours of Vicksburg's 15 designated stops. Visitors can use their cells to dial 601-262-2100 and follow recorded instructions to hear narratives explaining each stop and its significance. Tours enhanced by OnCell have been used at various other parks and historic sites, including Gulf Islands National Seashore in Florida and the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington DC.

Possible National Park in Auburn, NY

This past July Sen. Chuck Schumer began legislation that would establish two national historical parks honoring Harriet Tubman, including one in Auburn, NY. Schumer supplied testimony on the plan during a hearing held by the Senate Subcommittee on National Parks. The legislation calls for creating the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park in Auburn and the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historic Park in Maryland. The legislation next goes to the full Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, and then to the Senate floor for a vote. Don't hold your breath on this piece of legislation.

From the *Tully Times*, Sept. 12, 1919
courtesy of the Tully Area Historical Society archives

Return of the Old Onondaga Regiment

Some people remember when the 122nd, all Onondaga County Regiment, passed through Tully returning from the War en route to Syracuse for final muster from the US Service.

The time of the arrival of the train was not known as it was an

extra. At an early hour teams driving all kinds of vehicles filled with people commenced to arrive at the station. They came from the hills west of the lakes, Truxton Hill, Christian Hollow, Vesper, Otisco, Tully and Preble flats, enmasse as Tully was credited with sending our fifty-four men with the regiment when they started for the front, and enlisted at a period of the country's darkest hours. It was the largest crowd ever assembled at the station.

Besides those having friends in the organization, people wanted to see and greet the survivors of the regiment that had won everlasting fame and had never lowered its flag of battle.

People were perched on the roof of the station building, the water tank and in the trees which surrounded the premises. After a long wait, smoke was observed curling above the Preble swamp and the word was passed, "They are coming."

Soon a little wood burning engine with a funnel shaped smokestack, puffing black smoke nosed its way past the platform, followed by an ill jointed train comprising baggage cars, freight cars, and a flat car with boards extending from one side to the other forming seats which had been used by the soldiers all night, sitting in the smoke and sparks from the engine and three or four musty old passenger coaches in the rear.

On the roofs of freight cars were groups of darkies having a good time, their entire earthly possessions now and then a banjo. A member of the regiment estimates fifty of them left camp with the train and considering the number that fell off or were knocked off by overhead bridges, about forty arrived in Syracuse. Among them was an unusually bright youth Dick Johnson who came as a servant with Seth Trowbridge and became the village barber. On his return from Syracuse visits later he always mentioned having called on the old officers and that they were right glad to see him.

Upon the arrival of the train, the old Tully band, Henry Arnold leader, played "Kingdom Coming." Owing to the long train and big crowd, friends had difficulty in meeting and as it was a word and a handshake as the bugle sounded "fall in" and the train was off with a half dozen soldiers riding on the cowcatcher of the engine which had a hard time to make the grade on the curve leading to Ed Miller's crossing.

In the assemblage were sad hearts and tear-stained eyes for those who never returned. An affecting incident was the meeting of John Alderman, the gigantic flag bearer, and his wife. The day the regiment left Syracuse for the south, Fred their little son, left his school books on the desk and against the wishes or knowledge of his parents joined the soldier train at the Tully Station to become a drummer boy. He was soon a familiar figure in the band and reveille, and a general favorite in the regiment. Fred was captured with some soldiers and never heard from after being taken to Andersonville prison by the enemy. At the meeting of the parents, neither could speak.
- C. F. Trowbridge

Note: Renovation of the historic Tully Train Depot is underway. Recently an open house was held to show the progress being made.



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
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