

The Outpost

The Newsletter of the Salt Creek Civil War Roundtable
Vol. XLVI No. 5 January 2009



417th Regular Meeting

DATE: 2nd January 2009

PLACE: Fairview Village, 200 Village Dr., Downers Grove, Il.

TIME: 8:00 PM

SPEAKER: Robert Girardi

TOPIC: "Leonidas Polk and Kentucky in 1861"

As historians over the years have attempted to assign reasons for Confederate defeat, it seems a number of them have pointed to Gen. Leonidas Polk's occupation of Columbus, Ky. and that states subsequent declaration for the Union. Certainly, there are points to ponder: Kentucky's position astride easy water-borne invasion routes, the establishment of the seat of Western war at the Tennessee line, the exposure of the great depot and production center of Nashville, the comparatively greater accession of manpower the Union received, etc.. Robert Girardi will be examining the controversial stance of Kentucky neutrality and Polk's role in what transpired, as well as whether he has been fairly treated by history. As Rick Benson, the previously scheduled speaker, had a last-minute family commitment, Rob has graciously offered to step in.

Robert Girardi possesses an M.A. in History from Loyola University. He is also a past president of the Civil War Roundtable of Chicago, current Vice-President of the Salt Creek Civil War Roundtable, past newsletter editor of the SCCWRT, fellow of the Company of Military Historians, member of Northern Illinois and McHenry CWRT'S, associate member of the Sons of Union Veterans, author-editor of 5 books, currently working on 3 more, numerous articles and other writings. This will be his 7th formal presentation to the SCCWRT.



DECEMBER MEETING

BY

RICK BENSON

On December 5, 2008 approximately 40 members and guests of the Salt Creek Civil War Roundtable attended our annual "Evening of Show and Tell" and \$113 was raised for battlefield preservation.

Our lead-off hitter was the inimitable Jerry Feinstein with his trusty Model 1853 Enfield Rifle-Musket. This is believed to be the 2nd most used rifle in the Civil War, one specimen of more than 900,000 total rifles and pistols procured either from private contractors or imported from overseas. In the case of the Confederacy that meant blockade running as the British Government refused to supply them with munitions directly. In the case of Jerry's weapon, this original implement still carries the "cartouches" and proof marks that indicate it has passed the various stages of the inspection process. A weapon of this sort was capable of shooting a bullet through 4" of pine at 1000 yards with a muzzle velocity of 875' per second. No wonder that, if hit between the neck and the groin, the odds were your death was almost assured.

In the second spot, Don Sender brought along his Spencer rifle. There were comparatively few of

these used during the war. Don suggested this was largely because of the efforts of one Brig. Gen. James W. Ripley, Chief of Ordnance for the United States Army. He was 70 years old at the time and not in the mood for producing "new fangled jimcracks" like breech loading or repeating arms. For example, in Army and Navy testing the Spencer was found to have a rate of fire more than 4 times that of the muzzle-loading rifle. It was also reliable to the point that, if soaked in salt-water, it would still perform effectively. It was also much easier loading in the prone position. Lincoln ordered Ripley to procure 10,000 Spencers. When the manufacturer fell behind on delivery, Ripley cut the order to 7,500. He also limited the order to carbines even though infantry commanders wanted rifle versions. Ripley thought that to place these guns in the hands of foot soldiers would encourage them to waste ammunition! Ripley was finally removed in September 1863 and put to inspecting fortifications.

Next, Roger Bohn brought a reproduction 1861 Springfield rifle-musket. He also possesses an original weapon. Roger spoke of one of the difficulties encountered by

those who employed this implement in battle. Given the type of powder used in the war, there was a tendency for the rifle to misfire when the vent would get clogged with unburned powder and other debris. In the noise and excitement of battle, many men would not realize their rifle had not discharged. As a result, many of these weapons were found on the battlefield with anywhere from two to ten unfired rounds in the barrel. In addition to the rifle, Roger brought in two "match safes." These were containers for the common match, also known as "Lucifers", a reference to both the sulphuric smell of the match and the name of the devil. They were also referred to as "Vesta's" for the Roman Goddess of Hearth and Home as they were used to keep the hearth-fire lit at night.

Barney Bucholz brought in an assortment of documents from Major Samuel B. Sherer of the 36th Illinois. Vols. and Aurora, Il.. These papers recorded such activities as escorting a supply train and performance of picket duty. Barney also had a collection of GAR papers. These were all handwritten originals and exhibited a high degree of "fade" making them difficult to read. Nevertheless, these are wonderful documents that go a long way towards telling the day-to day stories of the soldiers and the veterans.

Gale Pewitt brought a varied assortment of documents: a framed piece of the original track the famed engine "The General" ran on in the "Great Locomotive Chase", original

signatures of Pres. J. Davis and Cassius Marcellus Clay, a small piece of wood from the tree Grant and Pemberton sat under when negotiating terms at Vicksburg, and a Derringer identical to the one used to kill Lincoln. In this last case, Gale realized what he had when he saw a picture of the infamous gun on television!

Mary Lord presented a clothing button used as a calling card by ladies of the evening to remind customers to come back. She also had some Matthew Brady photographs and a strange looking device whose functioning she demonstrated and then asked the group, "What is it?" After several guesses she revealed it was a "cherry pitter." The unknown aspect of this device was-did it really work!??

Lastly, (and leastly!-Ed.) Dan McCarthy exhibited his eclectic collection of Civil War photographs. The heart of this was his collection of *cartes de visite*, the "baseball cards" of the war and post-war era. Given the rise of prices in the collecting game, Dan has had to put new acquisitions on indefinite hold!

All in all it was a very interesting evening. A big THANK YOU to all who shared!



PRESERVATION REPORT

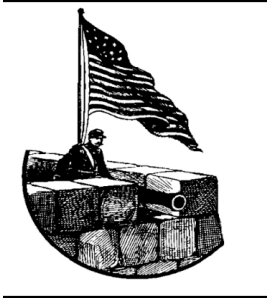
BY

LEN OVERCASH SR.

OH- Johnson's Island is the Civil War Confederate POW site in Sandusky Bay, near Cedar Point, in Sandusky Ohio. Fortunately, a

number of years ago, local CWRT'S and other preservationists signed a mortgage to save 17.2 acres of this historic site from a housing development. Originally owing \$357,000 after 6 years and two months, they now owe \$124,000 on the site.

Source: Clarksville CWRT



ALL
FOR
THE
UNION

On 1/27 at 7 PM, the Downers Grove Library will be hosting, "Lincoln and Springfield." Call the library at 630-960-1200 for more information.

At the last board meeting, a \$500 donation was approved to the Civil War Preservation Trust in memory of Tom O'Donnell. Also, \$250 will be going to the Albert Cashier Museum in Saunemin, Il.

The 2009 officer slate is as follows:
Jan Rasmussen, President, Rob Girardi, Vice-President, Rick Zarr, Secretary, Paula Walker, Treasurer, Dan McCarthy, Newsletter Editor ('til June), Cindy Intravartolo, Historian, Mary Lord, Meeting Liaison, Chuck Kurtz, Mary Lord, Cindy Heckler, Len Overcash, and Gil Mitchel, Board Members. Election will be held at the next meeting. If anyone wishes to put another name in nomination, get

their permission first, and then announce it at the meeting.



EDITOR'S NOTES

The next board meeting will be at the Fairview Village private dining room on 2/3/09 at 7:30 PM. Call Jan at 630-830-7614 with any questions.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February 6- Brian Seiter-Canby vs. Sibley



THE SALT CREEK CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

www.saltcreekcwrt.org

President: Jan Rasmussen

Vice-President: Robert Girardi

Treasurer: Paula Walker

Secretary: Rick Zarr

Historian: Cindy Intravartolo

Meeting Liaison: Mary Lord

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