



The Railsplitter

The Newsletter of the Department of Illinois

Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War



Winter 2024

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COMMANDER'S CORNER



Happy New Year to all the Brothers of the Department of Illinois!

Please include on your calendars upcoming events to include Lincoln's Death Day followed by Benjamin Stephenson Memorial Ceremony in April, our annual encampment in May at the newly remodeled GAR Hall in Aurora, and the Sons National Encampment in Kentucky in August.

I would appreciate it if you would keep me informed of your camp's activities so the Department can support your local affairs. Also, I encourage each camp to make a resolution to initiate 5 new members for the new year. Remember, meetings, social and community events benefit everyone. Hope to see many of our brothers in the spring. Stay well!!

In Fraternity, Charity and Loyalty

Gary Gunderson, Illinois Dept Commander, SUVCW

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER



Many of us make New Years resolutions, and one that I made was to spend less time on Social Media so that I can have more time for praying, reading and meditating.

As I look back on the past weeks, I have failed miserably. So, I have begun a process of making a Monday Morning Resolutions, in which I review the past week and see how well I have succeeded. I give a 👍

or a ❤️, but what am I accomplishing? Not much.

So don't look for me on Social Media, I am taking a hiatus. If you think this is a good idea - just say AMEN.

In Fraternity, Charity and Loyalty

Chaplain Jerry

AMEN!

PATRIOTIC INSTRUCTION



The Civil War was a war for freedom. During the four years of the Civil War, the United States began to redeem itself from the 250-year-long tragedy of slavery. Through the battles during that four year period, over four million African Americans won their freedom.

Now the question at that time for the newly freed and all other Americans was: Is everyone totally free to enjoy the rights and freedoms we enjoy today?

Let's examine the Reconstruction Amendments.

The Thirteenth Amendment (proposed in 1864 and ratified in 1865) abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, except for those convicted of a crime.

The Fourteenth Amendment (proposed in 1866 and ratified in 1868) addresses citizenship rights and equal protection of the laws for all citizens.

The Fifteenth Amendment (proposed in 1869 and ratified in 1870) prohibited discrimination in voting rights on the basis of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Even with the Reconstruction Amendments these rights were eroded by state laws, and federal court decisions. It took until the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in 1954, laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, to solidify the Reconstruction Amendments. By 1965 almost all former slaves were now dead, except for a former slave, Sylvester Magee, who claimed to be 130 years old. He died on October 15, 1971.

Let's also look at voting rights at the end of the Civil War. Yes, now every American man could vote, but for whom? They could vote for local and state officials and for the United States House of Representatives. At that time, U. S. Senators were chosen from each state's legislatures. It was not until April 8, 1913 that the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution had Senators directly chosen by popular vote. Some women had voting rights in various states as they joined the Union, but it wasn't until August 18, 1920 with the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, that all women gained the right to vote.

All Americans were exempt from Federal Taxes until February 3, 1913, with the ratification of the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution

The Fifth Amendment to the Constitution stated rights of "Life, Liberty, and Property." The abolishment of slavery meant that African American citizens could own a home and/or land. The United States Population in 1870 was 38,558,371. According to the 1870 census, white households owned 57% of property in America. Black households owned 7.7%. The remaining 35.3% of property in America was owned by 1% of the population primarily land barons and politicians.

The return of the Confederate States meant a new beginning to restore to all Americans the right to the American Dream.

Respectfully Submitted in F. C. L., Michael Zafran, PI and CC, P.H. Sheridan Camp #2

CAMP NEWS

MCCLERNAND CAMP 4 SPRINGFIELD

December 14, 2023 awoke to dreary, damp, and chilly day in Springfield to usher in the WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA initiative at Camp Butler. There were hundreds of cars and a thousand plus people scattered about to help place the beautiful wreaths. Most people enjoy the scenic look of long rows and rows of beautifully adorned grave makers on both the flatlands and the natural, sloping hills and ridges of our National Cemeteries. But this year something else caught my eye. As topography goes, tree-lines were special places on any number of Civil War battlefields. There are numerous accounts and photos to that effect in battlefield reports in archives throughout the land. The photo to the right is a typical one of a sprawling National Cemetery. But below is a picture of gravestones in near proximity to a tree-line. Here's hoping you enjoyed and were moved by this year's WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA event. - Courtesy Br Chuck Murphy

THIS IS AN ELECTION YEAR AND OUR COUNTRY IS DEEPLY DIVIDED POLITICALLY. THE ORDER IS ONCE AGAIN CALLED UPON TO EXHIBIT LOYALTY AND FIDELITY TO THE FLAG, PATRIOTISM, AND OUR COUNTRY - JUST LIKE OUR NAMESAKES DID. I HOPE BROTHER ZAFRAN SINGS A LITTLE LOUDER THIS YEAR. I HOPE THAT CHAPLAIN JERRY LEADS US EVEN MORE DEEPLY IN PRAYER THIS YEAR. I HOPE OUR ELECTED CAMP OFFICIALS CONTINUE TO LEAD US LIKE NEVER BEFORE. I HOPE THAT OUR PATRIOTIC INSTRUCTORS CONTINUE TO DO THEIR DUTY AS ZEALOUSLY AS EVER BEFORE. I HOPE THAT WE BEAR OUR BANNERS JUST A LITTLE HIGHER THIS YEAR. I HOPE THAT OUR PDCS CONTINUE TO EXEMPLIFY GOOD ORDER AND MODEL LEADERSHIP. PLUS, I PRAY THAT COMMANDER GUNDERSON WILL CONTINUE TO LEAD US IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION AS HE SO ADMIRABLY SERVES. HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL MY BROTHERS, AND TO YOU I WISH GOOD HEALTH AND HAPPINESS. COURTESY BR CHUCK MURPHY



What follows is self-explanatory. The Illinois Times has yet to print the article that appears below, and it is unknown if it will ever be published. If there wasn't available space, this item would never have been included in the "Railsplitter", but the topic is one that nonetheless is pertinent to the Order. It was written by yours truly as a private citizen, but if you'll permit - the patriotic instructor in me kept gushing as my cramping fingers keyboarded away. A copy of this letter was forwarded to the Task Force chairperson and it may yet be sent the Secretary of State and Governor Pritzger. - Courtesy Br Chuck Murphy

October 2, 2023

Dear Illinois Times Editor

NO SHORTAGES IN ILLINOIS

Growing up in Jacksonville in the 50s and early 60s, whether it was to attend the State Fair, visit the Lincoln Sites, keep an appointment with a medical specialist, dine at Stevie's Latin Village, or witness the mighty, mighty Crimsons take on the Cyclones, Lions, Senators, or the Spartans, the drive over to Springfield was always fun. Once we made our way through New Berlin on the old two-lane Rt. 36/54, my older sister, younger brother and I would always compete to see which of us would be the first to see the distant dome of the Illinois State Capitol. And then once in town we'd drive slowly down 2nd Street to observe the Statehouse lawn, the glorious statues, and the magnificent State Capitol Building. It is understandable that people who live and work in Springfield become accustomed to it, but it is all really quite majestic.

Speaking of such, there is a lot going on at the State Capitol Complex. The North Wing of the Statehouse is undergoing a major renovation and a special task force is considering adding and removing statues and monuments.

Due primarily to Abraham Lincoln and convention facilities, Springfield is a destination city for visitors, tourists, historians, and conventioners alike. But it also attracts a wide range of travelers due to its designation as the seat of state government in Illinois. Organized, informative tours of the interior of the Statehouse are popular, and no doubt the southeast lawn of the State Capitol and the north face of the Howlett Building attract onlookers as well.

As state officials consider removing and/or adding statues and memorials, perhaps they'll assess the existing five on the east by southeast lawn to help determine the best way forward. Among the five are the statues of Abraham Lincoln, Everett Dirksen, John Palmer, Richard Yates, and the Howlett (Centennial) Building.

Despite the fact that there is no biographical information etched on Yates' statue or pedestal - as compared to Palmer's - the common theme among four of these memorials is the Civil War. It clearly signifies that a little over one hundred years ago, our state leaders and citizenry thought that the most significant event of the State of Illinois' first century was the war. Between the prelude to Civil War, the war itself, and the war's aftermath, such certainly makes sense.

It makes you wonder though. Dirksen's is the only outlier, otherwise all the statues and the memorial on the southeast portion of the grounds relate to the Civil War. Such stands to reason as the boys from Illinois marched south, and then east through Dixie to help quell the rebellion and preserve the Union. But why does Palmer have a statue, and not Olgesby? Where are the statues of Illinoisans named Grierson, Logan, McClernand, and Grant? How does or should a generation, let alone a century of Illinoisans decide who to memorize with an individual statue? How many statues can fit on the existing lawn?

Are statues dedicated to a single individual even the way to go? Over the past few years, the country, other states, and the State of Illinois have found it necessary to remove statues (the statue of Stephen A. Douglas was removed from the Statehouse lawn on September 26, 2020). As we evolve, opinions change as to who has been admired in the past, and why. Some things that they did in either their professional or personal lives are found to be offensive or objectionable to successor generations.

April will be here before you know it, and before the spring newsletter is routed, we shall have honored Abraham Lincoln at his tomb and Benjamin Stephenson at his memorial in Petersburg IL. We have much to look forward to and indeed, we're counting on your participation. See you there. In F. C. L. - Courtesy Br Chuck Murphy

It is not necessarily suggested that the State should erect a building dedicated to each century of Illinois' Statehood, but our predecessors used foresight when they erected the Centennial Building and established what one might call a worthwhile precedent, if you will. It truly recognizes a whole century of Illinoisans and in addition, the names of those who made significant contributions are etched on the frieze of the building's four corners. In fact, despite the fact that his statue was removed, Douglas' name remains fixed in-between the names Lincoln and Yates in the frieze of the northeast corner of the building. As a matter of fact, noting distinguished Illinoisans on the frieze of buildings that make up the State Capitol Complex is a tradition of sorts, as they are also etched on the frieze of both the Illinois State Library and the Illinois State Archives.

The purpose of the Centennial Building is quite clear, "TO COMMEMORATE THE ADMISSION OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS INTO THE FEDERAL UNION", as is engraved above the columns on the north face of the building. It is unknown what visitors who live elsewhere in Illinois, in other states, or who come from afar think about the name of the Centennial Building being changed to the Michael G. Howlett Building. Though it probably wasn't the

intent, locals and visitors are free to wonder whether Secretary of State George Ryan thought that Howlett's contributions were more significant than a whole century of Illinoisans who came before him.



In between the windows on the north face of the Centennial Building (see photo on the left courtesy of Br Chuck Murphy), but just a tad above eye-level for most, are seven matching architectural squares. In two of them are relatively small tablets. One speaks to the date that the building's name was changed and the other is a tablet depicting the Gettysburg Address dated 1940, sponsored by the SUVCW Commandery during the last GAR

National Encampment in Springfield in 1940 (see photo above right courtesy of Br Chuck Murphy). It makes one wonder why there are only two, and why from east to west they're placed in the fourth and seventh squares, respectively. There seems to be space for other tablets, murals, relief sculptures, or any number of other ways to illustrate and celebrate Illinois' culture, diversity, and history - of which we have no shortages.

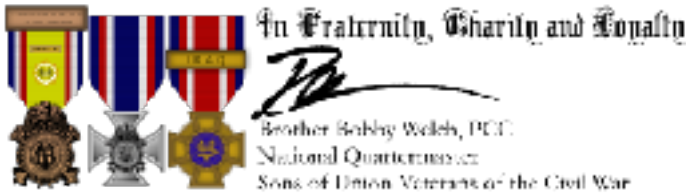
A memorial dedicated to the state's second century of statehood may not be very imaginative, but there are no shortages of Illinoisans who deserve to have their names etched on the frieze of what could be called the Illinois Bicentennial Building. Between 1918 and 2018, men and women from throughout Illinois made significant contributions, earned recognition and consistent with an Illinois tradition, deserve to have their names elevated for all to see, look up to, and admire.

There is only so much space in the capitol complex and erecting yet another building may not be in the cards. But should we find ourselves restoring an older building in the complex, other than the Illinois Statehouse, such as the Illinois State Armory, which is now the case, there exists a viable option.

Much is written about why people are moving away from Illinois, but many of us were born here and here we'll die and be buried. We are excited about the future, yet committed to the past, and anxious to exhibit our state's public history to the world. The Illinois State Capitol Complex and its lawn is not only majestic, it represents the formal entrance to the "Land of Lincoln". We are wise to use available space wisely and take full advantage of it to put on public display that which we are most proud, and the names of those to whom we owe so much.

HARDENBERG CAMP 39 TINLEY PAR

ON JANUARY 11, PVT HENRY M HARDENBERG CAMP #39 HELD THEIR FIRST MEETING OF 2024. IT WAS A NUMBER OF FIRSTS THAT DAY. COMMANDER TIMOTHY MARCUS HAD HIS FIRST MEETING AS CAMP COMMANDER AND INITIATED HIS FIRST MEMBER. PICTURED ARE COMMANDER MARCUS AND BROTHER GEORGE HELWICH, ON THE FAR RIGHT. BROTHER HELWICH'S 4TH GREAT GRANDFATHER IS MAJOR CHARLES E. STORRS, WHO SERVED IN CO. B, 6TH MICHIGAN CAVALRY.



HECKER CAMP 443 BELLEVILLE

The photo on the right below, taken by Brian Keller, is of our camp marching in a local Veterans Day parade on Nov. 11.

IN THE PHOTO ON THE RIGHT, NOTICE HOW ERECT THE FLAG BEARER, BROTHER STANTON, IS SMARTLY STEPPING AND HOW PROUDLY HE BEARS OLD GLORY. HERMAN MELVILLE PUBLISHED THE POEM ENTITLED "THE MARCH INTO VIRGINIA, ENDING IN THE FIRST MANASSAS". THE 16TH AND 17TH LINES FROM THE POEM GO THUSLY, "THE BANNERS PLAY, THE BUGLES CALL, THE AIR IS BLUE AND PRODIGAL". WE DO IT ALL THE TIME - MARCH THE COLORS IN FORMAL CEREMONIES ON SUNNY, BLUE SKY DAYS - AND I SUSPECT THAT WE'LL NEVER TIRE OF THE TASK. THOUGHT WE MAY NOT REMAIN COGNIZANT OF IT ALL THE TIME, PEOPLE NOTICE AND HOLD THEIR CHINS JUST A LITTLE HIGHER AS THE PROCESSION PASSES, AS DO I. - COURTESY BR CHUCK MURPHY



THE POSED GROUP SHOT OF OUR CAMP'S BROTHERS BELOW AT THE TOP OF THE NEXT PAGE WAS TAKEN BY A VERY NICE LOCAL SCOUTMASTER. THANK YOU TO ALL THE BROTHERS AND OUR SUPPORTERS WHO CAME OUT TO HELP US MAKE THE O'FALLON, ILLINOIS VETERANS DAY PARADE A GREAT SHOWING. STANDING LEFT TO RIGHT BELOW ARE PCC GARRY LADD, DONNA REES, BROTHER RICHARD PIPER, BROTHER GERALD SONNENBERG, NEWLY ELECTED SVC JOHN STANTON, BROTHER JUSTIN OTTOLINI, NEWLY ELECTED CAMP COMMANDER RUSSELL SCHLEICHER, DIANE ZELINSKE, AND PCC GREG ZELINSKE.



Thank you,
Gerald Sonnenberg, USAF retired
Hecker Camp #443 Secretary

Fraternity Charity Loyalty

“You will give attention while the Chaplain asks the blessing of God on our deliberations.”

THE EXCERPT IN QUOTATION MARKS ABOVE IS FROM THE SUVCVW
INITIATION CEREMONY

Courtesy Br Chuck Murphy

ILLINOIS' BIG TEN (Courtesy Br Chuck Murphy)

A prestigious, distinguished bunch.

Looking back over the span of 83 years, 76 served as Commander-in-Chief (CinC) of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR). Terms were one-year in duration and 10 of them served only part of a term, six of them served two terms, and one served three. They were of 24 different states and Washington DC and so obviously, several of them were from the same state.

One came from each Colorado, Connecticut, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington DC, and Washington. Two of them came from Michigan and three of them were from each Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin, respectively. States that were home to four of the commanders each include California, Indiana, Iowa, and Nebraska. Six were from the State of Massachusetts, and eight hailed from Pennsylvania. New York was home to nine, and ten of them were from the Land of Lincoln and, at least for this article, have been dubbed, Illinois' Big Ten". (*The Wikipedia "List of Grand Army of the Republic Commanders-in-Chief" available on line is the source that was used in calculating the number of C'sinC by state.*)

It was unique for commanders to serve more than one term and, unfortunately, a few died in office. Only one commander served two non-consecutive terms, Robert McKee Rownd, of New York. He was in office in 1938-1939 and then again in 1947-1948. Those serving two consecutive terms include Stephen Augustus Hurlbut, of Illinois, 1866-1868; Ambrose Everett Burnside, of Rhode Island, 1871-1873; John Frederick Hartranft, Pennsylvania, 1875-1877; and John Cleveland Robinson, of New York, 1877-1879. Only one commander served three consecutive terms, John A. Logan, of Illinois, 1868-1871.

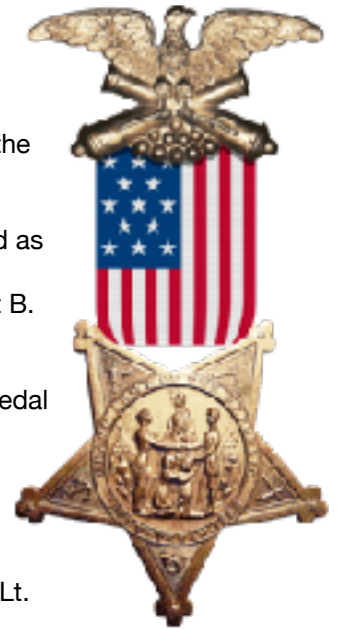
Three of the five who died while in office were of Illinois. Included in the five are: James Andrew Sexton, of Illinois, 1898-1899. He died Feb. 5, 1899; James David Bell, of New York, 1919-1920. He died November 1, 1919; William

Parker Wright, of Illinois, 1932-1933. He died June 15, 1933; John E. Andrew, of Illinois, 1940-1940. He died June 30, 1940; and Theodore Penland, of Oregon, 1948-1948. He died September, 13, 1950.

The first enlisted man to serve as commander was Paul Vandervort, of Nebraska. He served in 1882-1883. The commander serving when the organization reached its largest membership in 1890 was, Wheelock Graves Veazey, of Vermont. The commander in 1913, when the encampment was held in Chattanooga, was Alfred Bishop Beers, of Connecticut. Chattanooga was the only former Confederate State where the GAR held an encampment and, interestingly, the SUVCW has never encamped there.

Four of the GAR commanders were medal of honor recipients. Coincidentally, two of them served as commanders back to back. In chronological order of the dates in which they served as GAR commander, they include Wheelock G. Veazey, John C. Black, Wilmon W. Blackmar, and Robert B. Burns.

Wheelock Graves Veazey, of Vermont, served as the 19th CinC from 1890-91. He earned the medal on July 3, 1863 at Gettysburg for extraordinary heroism while serving with the 16th Vermont Infantry Regiment. Colonel Veazey assembled his regiment, made up of new troops in their first battle, and charged the enemy's flank under heavy fire and destroyed a Confederate brigade. His medal was issued on September 8, 1891.



The GAR Badge

John Charles Black, of Illinois, was the 32nd CinC from 1903-04. As Lt. Colonel of the 37th IL Infantry, he earned the medal on December 7, 1862 at Prairie Grove, Arkansas when he gallantly charged the enemy at the head of his regiment, after two other regiments had been repulsed, and despite being severely wounded, captured a battery. His medal was awarded October 31, 1893. (A request has been sent to the National Archives for a copy of his medal file.)

Wilmon Whilldin Blackmar, of Massachusetts, was the 33rd CinC from 1904-05. Starting out his Civil War career as a Private, Lieutenant Blackmar was serving with the West Virginia Cavalry when on April 1, 1865, at a critical stage of the battle of Five Forks, without orders he led a successful advance upon the enemy. His medal was bestowed October 23, 1897.

Robert Burns Brown, of Ohio, served as the 36th CinC from 1906-07. His medal was conferred March 27, 1890. On November 25, 1863 Private Brown captured the flag bearer and the flag of the 9th Mississippi in action at Missionary Ridge.

One of Illinois' Big Ten is interred in the District of Columbia, but the nine others are buried in cities and towns throughout Illinois, including Belvidere, Chicago, Danville, Monticello, Naperville, Petersburg, Princeton, Rockford, and Springfield. Save for the one interred in Springfield, it is unknown in every instance if there are markers on many of their grave sites indicating their prestige and celebrity as a GAR CinC, or not. Should Dept Camps be willing to send in photos of former GAR CsinC headstones in cemeteries within your proximity, we'd be more than happy to display them in an upcoming newsletter.



Civil War Medal of Honor

For purposes of this article, let's focus on Illinois Big Ten's lineup. Their stories are all different but they all intersect at the summit of the GAR. It is likely that they were not all gifted strategists, executives, motivators, socialites politicians, leaders, and commanders, but they all would have had tendencies that were at least found acceptable to the membership at large. In their day, they were reputable, nationally known celebrities among Civil War veterans and their extended families, and were looked up to with great hope and expectations. Over and above what they did in the war, they deserve to be memorialized as after the war, they yielded great influence and power on behalf of our namesake forefathers.

In chronological order of when they served as CinC, Illinois' Big Ten include:

- 1.) Benjamin Franklin Stephenson, 1866 - founder and provisional commander, buried in Rose Hill Cemetery, Petersburg Cemetery.
- 2.) Stephen Augustus Hurlbut, 1866-1868 - two consecutive terms, buried in Belvidere Cemetery, Belvidere IL.
- 3.) John Alexander Logan 1868-1871 - three consecutive terms and through General Order No. 11, dated May 5, 1868, founded Decoration Day. Buried in U.S. Soldier's and Airman's Home National Cemetery, District of Columbia, Washington DC.
- 4.) Thomas G. Lawler, 1894-1895, Cedar Bluff Cemetery, Rockford, IL.
- 5.) James Andrew Sexton, 1898-1899 - died in office Feb 5, 1899. Buried in Rosehill Cemetery and Mausoleum, Chicago.
- 6.) John Charles Black, 1903-1904 - medal of honor recipient - buried in Spring Hill Cemetery and Mausoleum, Danville IL.
- 7.) Harvey Marion Trimble, 1921-1912 - grave site is in Oakland Cemetery, Princeton IL.
- 8.) John Baptist Inman, 1925-1926, buried at Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield, IL.
- 9.) William Parkinson Wright, 1932-1933. Died in office June 15, 1923. 25th CinC Mollus, 1931-1933, 66th CinC GAR, 1932-1933 - the only person to be CinC of Mollus and the GAR. He was the last CinC who actually served in the war. He commanded the GAR Blanchard post in Naperville and A Lincoln post in Chicago 1921 - 1922, Past Illinois Commander. He is buried in Naperville Cemetery, Naperville Illinois.
- 10.) John E. Andrew 1940-1940, died in office June 30, 1940, and is buried in Monticello Cemetery, Monticello, IL



(After googling same, the photos on the right (as well as details associated with C'sinC Logan and Wright of Illinois' Big Ten fame) were found on-line and downloaded. - Courtesy Br Chuck Murphy.)

BACK IN THE 1990S YOURS TRULY TOOK A STAB AT DESIGNING SINGLE-PAGE TRIBUTES TO SOME OF THE CIVIL WAR'S MOST CONSEQUENTIAL BATTLES. THEY WERE CREATED BACK THEN TO HELP ME KEEP THINGS STRAIGHT AND NOT CONFUSE FACTS ABOUT ONE BATTLE VERSUS OTHERS. IF I WERE TO DESIGN THEM TODAY, THEY WOULD MOST ASSUREDLY READ DIFFERENTLY. I AM NOW ANCIENT IN TERMS OF DOG YEARS AND MY TRIBUTE COLLECTION IS NOW STREWN IN THE DUSTBIN OF MY CIVIL WAR MEMORABILIA DOWN IN THE BASEMENT. FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN TO REMIND US OF THE DETAILS ASSOCIATED WITH ONE OF THE MOST EPIC CIVIL WAR BATTLES, AND TO OF COURSE WAX PATRIOTISM, PLEASE SEE THE BACK PAGE OF THIS ISSUE OF FOR ONE SUCH TRIBUTE. COURTESY BR CHUCK MURPHY

In Three Parts - A Railsplitter Extra**The Shiloh Triad: Lost Stories of Three Illinoisans at Pittsburg Landing**

In three different issues of the Railsplitter back in 2023, you were introduced to Vicksburg's three medal of honor recipients. They include from left to right below: John Wade McDonald, Ellwood Williams, and John Spaulding. These photos were found on-line some twelve years ago and downloaded specifically for this story. This essay is excerpted from a paper that yours truly presented at the Historic Preservation Agency's Conference on Illinois History back on October 11 and 12, 2012. It was initially intended to exhibit this topic in three consecutive issues of "Railsplitter", but it spilled over into a fourth. Based upon the abundant number of items that were sent in for intervening newsletters, until now there has not been sufficient space for what has become the fourth, and last part of the story. There is finally capacity in this the Winter 2024 newsletter, so this'll be the final segment. Thank you for you patience, and for reading. - Courtesy Br Chuck Murphy



Visiting Shiloh in early July, 2012, it was disappointing to learn that there were no markers, indeed no signage of any kind devoted to the three medal recipients. My initial thought was that if no one knows about them, obscurity of Illinois' lost three at Shiloh is assured. If their most gallant efforts could not be recognized and interpreted on the battlefield, where could a more appropriate site be? My initial appeal was to park rangers. They were very courteous, and advised that they would be happy to consider any papers, booklets, brochures or the like, but that markers, memorials, or signage of any kind was prohibited. My frame of reference was the marker in tribute to medal recipient, Thomas J. Higgins, on the 2nd Texas Lunette, at Vicksburg. They pointed out that unlike other Civil War battlefields, there are no statues dedicated to individuals at Shiloh, not even to Union MG Ulysses S. Grant. They instructed that different national parks can have different rules and to my chagrin, the park superintendent backed them up.

An appeal was then directed to the regional director of the Southeast Region of the National Park Service, who's office was in Atlanta, Georgia. Regional Director Stan Austin's informative and very respectful reply was dated May 27, 2014. Paraphrasing, he wrote, Shiloh National Military Park was originally established in 1894, through a commission comprised of men representing the three armies engaged in the battle. The legislation establishing the Park authorized "each state with troops involved in the battle, to make the lines of engagement for their units". "These markers are called monuments or tablets." "There was no such authorization for states not having troops in the battle, or for private citizens, to do likewise."

His third paragraph was most enlightening. “The commission understood that during the two-day battle there was great confusion on both sides and that officers frequently found themselves leading soldiers of units not normally under their organizational command. Historians describe this as a “soldiers battle” environment. To reflect these circumstances, the commission decided that commemorative features erected on the battlefield would remain a memorial to all the brave soldiers who fought, rather than individual recognition. In keeping with this decision, Shiloh battlefield does not contain any statues for specific generals or similar markers. We continue to manage the Park under the legislation that reflects the original guidelines established by the first Shiloh Battlefield Commission. We appreciate the bravery and sacrifice of the men who received the Medal of Honor for their individual efforts at Shiloh; however, it would be inconsistent with the Park’s legislation to install such a memorial or marker.”

Austin’s letter does not lack for clarity. Disappointed? Sure. Even though these three young men were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor by the President of the United States - absent battlefield memorials - their individual stories, their valorous acts, and their names will remain unknown to throngs of battlefield visitors. For all practical purposes, they are lost to history. It is nothing short of unfortunate. A “soldiers battle” or not - hard fighting is one thing - but risking one’s life during the sting of battle, to save the lives of comrades, is simply quite another. Save for the intrepidity of these three, there was very little valor on display at Shiloh on Sunday, April 6, 1862. The Confederates had many in Grant’s army panicked, and on the run. Save for Generals Grant and Sherman, select other Union commanders, and the grit of some of the more stalwart Blueboys, that particular Sunday was not the Union army’s finest hour. The consensus of the day among the youthful, inexperienced, and undisciplined Union troops was best articulated by Colonel Jessie Appler, of the 53rd Ohio Infantry Regiment. As the 53rd Ohio received the van of the Rebel’s surprise attack on the far southwest edge of the battlefield, Colonel Appler screamed hysterically, “Retreat, and save yourselves!” “Retreat, and save yourselves!” Many, many Blueboys on the field that day scampered for the landing and by all outward appearances, thought only of themselves. In contrast, and quite remarkably, the triad of McDonald, Williams, and Spalding selflessly jeopardized their own mortality, while directly engaged in lethal warfare with the enemy, to save the lives of others.

Clearly, the juxtaposition of Congress’ medal of honor, and the Shiloh Civil War Battlefield Commission’s take on individual recognition, is an imperfect fit. However, for serious Civil War practitioners, such as the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, there must be an alternative way to bring to the fore the valorous contributions of these three outstanding Illinoisans. Hopefully, an article in the *Railsplitter*, the Department of Illinois’ newsletter, is a step in the right direction.

In my lifetime I never once thought that I would see Confederate Battle flags come down in old Dixie - military installations renamed - or the State of Illinois remove the statue of an Illinoian whose name is in any number of books relative to antebellum politics, Abraham Lincoln, Illinois history, and the Civil War. I don’t pretend to have a particular slant about these matters and it clearly is not my place to comment one way or the other. Nor is it for me to question the judgment of Congress, or the Shiloh Battlefield Commission and its take on no statues at Pittsburg Landing. Suffice it to say, however, that just as hallmark decisions described above are surprisingly occurring during my lifetime - it just may be after I am no more - others who are like-minded may render decisions which permit not statues, but tablets dedicated to McDonald, Williams, and Spaulding to be displayed on site at Pittsburg Landing. “Not without thy wondrous story, Illinois,” Illinois,”

In an earlier newsletter I had incorporated the third verse of the state song, “Illinois”. Word is that there is interest in adopting a new, more modern state song. It is not known how much longer the song “Illinois” will survive as written. For that reason, it is space well used to record its lyrics, especially the fourth verse, in the Dept of Illinois newsletter, the “*Railsplitter*”. It goes like this:

“Not without thy wondrous story, Illinois, Illinois,

Can be writ the nation’s glory, Illinois, Illinois,

On the record of thy years,

Abraham Lincoln’s name appears,

Grant and Logan, and our tears, Illinois, Illinois,

Grant and Logan, and our tears, Illinois.”

The articles about these three medal recipients, “Illinois’ Big Ten” and “No Shortages in Illinois”, really brings home to our Dept Brotherhood how much we have to honor and celebrate relative to the role played by Illinois, our ancestors who wore the Blue, the GAR, and the SUVCW. “Not without thy wondrous story, Illinois, Illinois.”

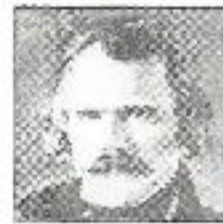


U.S. Grant

Battle of Pittsburg Landing



Battle of Shiloh, Bloody Shiloh



A.S. Johnston

UNION FORCES

ARMY OF THE TENNESSEE

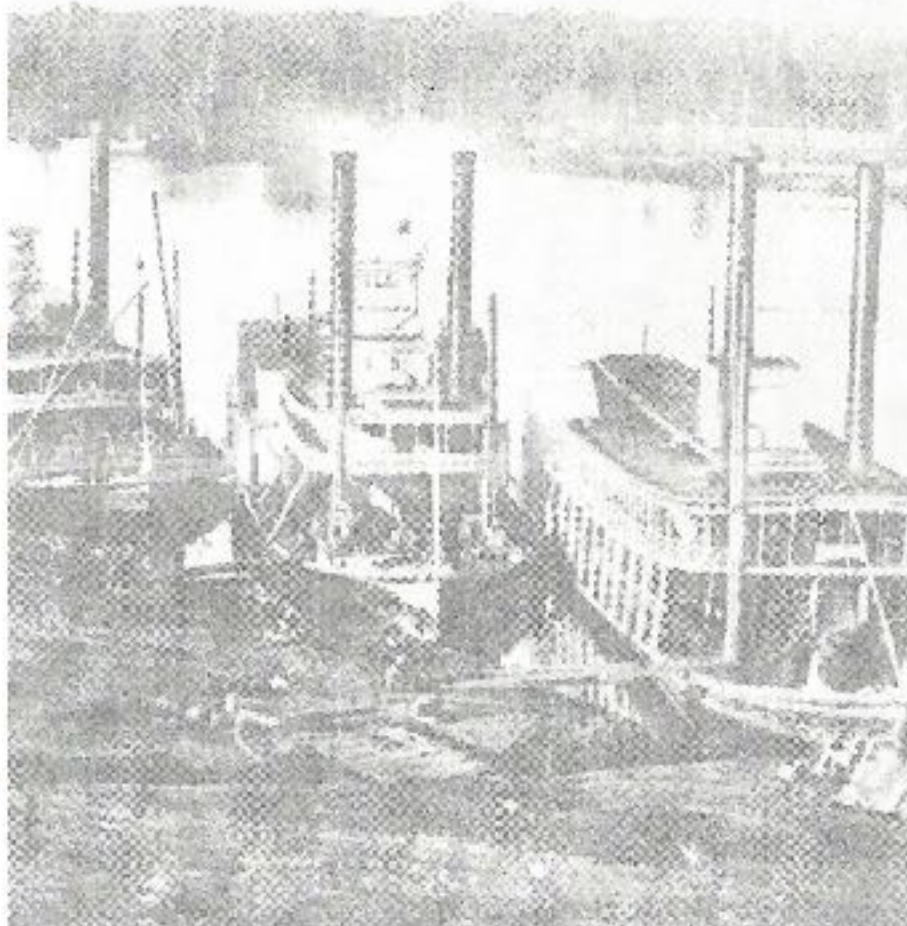
M.G. Ulysses Grant
1st Division
M.G. John
McClelland
2nd Division
B.G. William
Wallace
3rd Division
M.G. Low Wallace
4th Division
B.G. Stephen Hurlbut
5th Division
B.G. William
Sherman
6th Division
B.B. Benjamin
Prentiss

ARMY OF THE OHIO

M.G. Don Carlos
Buell
1st Division
B.G. Thomas
Crittenden
2nd Division
B.G. Alexander
McCook
4th Division
B.G. William Nelson
5th Division
B.G. Thomas Wood

CASUALTIES

Missing - 2,885
Wounded - 8,480
Killed - 1,754



CONFEDERATE FORCES

ARMY OF THE MISSISSIPPI

Gen. A.S. Johnston
Gen. P.G.T.
Beauregard
1st Corps
M.G. Leonidas Polk
1st Division
B.G. Alexander
Stewart
2nd Division
M.G. Benjamin
Cheatham
2nd Corps
M.G. Braxton Bragg
1st Division
B.S. Daniel Suggles
2nd Division
B.G. James Wilson
3rd Corps
M.G. William Hardee
1st Brigade
B.S. Thomas
Hindson
2nd Brigade
B.S. Patrick
Cleburne
3rd Brigade
B.G. Sterling Wood
Reserve Corps
B.S. John
Brecheenridge

CASUALTIES

Missing - 959
Wounded - 8,812
Killed - 1,728

By the end of March, 1862, the Union forces at Pittsburgh Landing had been built up to nearly 40,000 troops. Sherman set up "Camp Shiloh" in preparation for an attack against the Rebel forces at Corinth, Mississippi, twenty-two miles to the south. Union commanders never dreamed that the Rebels would advance as far from their supply base at Corinth as necessary to actually launch an attack, so they did not entrench. The Confederate generals combined their 44,000 troops in order to meet and repel the Yankee offensive along the Tennessee River. Beauregard's plan was to drive Grant's army into the river at Pittsburgh Landing before Buell arrived with 18,000 Yankee reinforcements.

Because he had little confidence in volunteer soldiers, for days Sherman ignored the "exaggerated" reports that the Rebels were massing in strength just south of the Union camp. The Confederates attacked early on the morning of April 6, 1862 and handily pushed the surprised Yankees back to the area of Shiloh Church and beyond. Grant arrived from Savannah, some nine miles north, at about 9:00 am aboard the gunboat "Tigress". By late morning Grant's army was retreating back from the Peach Orchard, the site where Confederate General A.S. Johnston was later wounded and, by 2:30 pm, had bled to death. By midday the Union army took up strong defensive positions at the Sunken Road, Bloody Pond and the wooded area of the Hornets' Nest, only to relinquish the bloody ground by late in the afternoon.

Yankee gunboats helped stave off the Rebels late in the day and then fired at their camps all night long. Bragg and Beauregard slept in Sherman's tent on the night of April 6 and were as surprised as everyone else at the Union counter-attack which came on the morning of April 7. They did not know that Buell's forces had arrived. Led by "Bull" Nelson, Buell's troops fought along side Grant's as the Yankees proceeded to regain all the lost ground and, by late afternoon, had swept the Confederates from the field. Grant was accused of being drunk and was severely criticized (even temporarily relieved) because the Union army had been surprised and almost licked. For his brave and heroic actions at Shiloh, Sherman was promoted to Major General.