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# *Battle Cry*

Founded 1961,  
Newsletter of the Sacramento Civil War Round Table  
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## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:**

I don't recall if we brought up the subject of the ship models that were on display at the 2012 West Coast conference in Orange County. These were models of ships that were specifically military in nature. There were armored ships, and some which had only a very heavy layer of wood to protect the crews. We wanted to display these at Gibson Ranch in May, but by the time we contacted the model-maker, he was already committed to displaying a World War II German scouting plane in May.

The Board discussed the models and decided this would be a good place to spend some of our funds which we have from our fund-raising efforts. Gibson Ranch being one of our most important civic service efforts, this seemed like a good idea. We will try to do it at a future date. Since these models are maritime in nature, we might even get some of our nautical re-enactors to stand by and provide a real treat for the public. We will discuss this some more as we get closer to the Gibson Ranch event in 2014.

**Bob Hanley, President**

**MINUTES**  
**SACRAMENTO CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE**  
**Wednesday, March 13, 2013**  
**HOF BRAU RESTAURANT, 2500 WATT AVENUE, SACRAMENTO**

**ATTENDANCE – 32**

**MEMBERS – 27**

Robert E. Hanley, President  
Anne M. Peasley, Vice President  
George W. Foxworth, Treasurer  
James M. Armstrong  
Roy Bishop  
Harvey D. Cain  
Marsha J. Cain  
Ardith A. Cnota  
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Monica S. Foxworth  
Donald J. Hayden, IPP  
Scottie Hayden  
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Wayne J. Henley, MAL

Lowell L. Lardie  
Kim Grace Long  
Vivian S. Miller  
Rick A. Peasley  
Horst Penning  
Mark Penning  
John Rice  
Paul G. Ruud  
Nancy B. Samuelson  
Richard Sickert  
Roxanne E. Spizzirri  
Silver N. Williams, PD  
John V. Zasso

**GUESTS – 5**

Esther Boeck  
Doug Ose  
Larry Spizzirri  
Richard Spizzirri  
Ray Valdez

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM. by President Robert Hanley.
2. Gibson Ranch will be May 3 – 5, 2013. Docents were requested to lead the children on Friday, May 3, and docents were requested to work the Sacramento CWRT Booth on May 4 – 5.
3. President Hanley announced that the Board desires to sponsor the 2015 West Coast Civil War Conference. Those in attendance said yes.
4. The 2013 Conference will be sponsored by the San Joaquin Valley CWRT and will be a multiple-day cruise from Southern California down the coast of Mexico and returning. The dates are November 1 – 4, 2013.
5. President Hanley then introduced the speaker, Silver Williams, Program Director. Her topic was “Women Spies in the Civil War, Elizabeth Van Lew.” Van Lew was also known as “Crazy Bett.” She was born on October 25, 1818 in Richmond, Virginia to a family of abolitionists. Elizabeth was educated at a Quaker school in Philadelphia.
  - a. Upon the outbreak of the War, Van Lew began working for the Union. When Libby Prison was opened in Richmond, Van Lew was allowed to bring food, clothing, writing paper, and other items to the Union soldiers imprisoned there. She aided prisoners in escape attempts, passing them information about safe houses, and getting a Union sympathizer appointed to the Prison staff. Prisoners gave Van Lew information on Confederate troop levels and movements, which she was able to pass on to Union commanders.
  - b. Van Lew's spy network was very efficient. She developed a cipher system and often smuggled messages out of Richmond in hollow eggs. When Richmond fell to Union forces in April 1865, Van Lew was the first person to raise the United States flag in the city. President Grant made her postmaster of Richmond and she served in that office from 1869 to 1877.
  - c. After Reconstruction, Van Lew became increasingly ostracized in Richmond. She persuaded the United States Department of War to give her all of her records, so she could hide the extent of her espionage from her neighbors. Van Lew died on September 25, 1900, and was buried in Shockee Hill Cemetery in Richmond. Even into the 20th century, Van Lew was regarded by many Southerners as a traitor.
6. President Hanley thanked Silver Williams for her presentation.
7. Doug Ose announced that the Gibson Ranch Re-Enactment is May 3 – 5, 2013. Eighteen (18) docents are needed on Friday, May 3, for the Schools’ Day Program. Approximately 1,700 students are already participating. In addition, schools that desire to participate can contact Gibson Ranch at 916-806-3868.
8. John Zasso sold additional raffle tickets and read the numbers.
9. The meeting was adjourned at 8:33 PM.
10. There was no Board Meeting. The next Board Meeting will be Wednesday, March 27, 2013.

**George W. Foxworth, Acting for Secretary Maxine Wollen**

**Treasurer’s Report**

The cash balance following the March 13, 2013 meeting was \$3,024.70. Thanks to John Zasso, other members, and guests, the raffle brought in \$54.00.

**George W. Foxworth, Treasurer**



## BOOK REVIEW



***The Business of Captivity: Elmira and Its Civil War Prison* by Michael P. Gray. Illustrated, map, notes, bibliography, index, 228 pp., 2001. The Kent State University Press.**

The question of captivity is often quite perplexing in any war and was quite so during the Civil War. Author Michael P. Gray delves into this conundrum full force and shows what it was like to be held captive in the most heinous of Northern jails, “Helmira,” better known as Elmira.

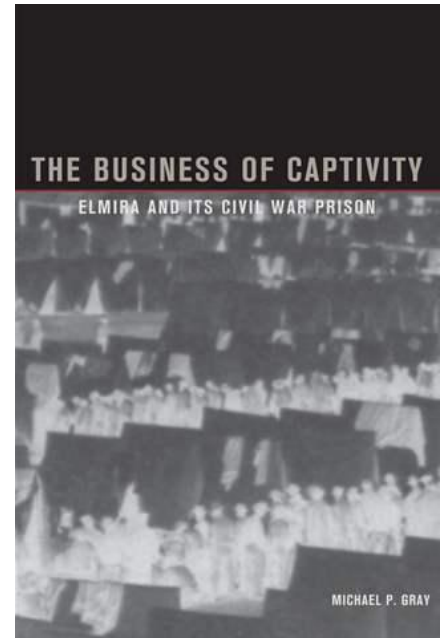
His analysis shows that the proper handling of prisoners was more intricate than once believed and that captivity took on a life of its own while setting forth new business principles behind the stockade walls. Enormous amounts of food, staffing, lumber, clothing, paper, and every other item that is necessary to operate a prison is well documented within these pages.

This book has been broken down into a chapter-by-chapter discovery of what occurred at Elmira just before, during and right after the Civil War. It began as a simple depot laid out to house soldiers as they prepared to go off to war. Men arrived for training, were processed, fed, trained, and sent off to battle.

With the troops moving off to fight, many barracks were left unoccupied and Asst. Adj. Gen. Edward D. Townsend brought this situation to the attention of Commissary General of Prisoners William Hoffman. Hoffman believed these empty barracks could help alleviate overcrowding in Northern prisons and do so in a more economical fashion.

The train account discussed in Chapter Two on “The Inauguration of Elmira Prison” really hits home on how past tragedies mirror what has occurred in our lives today. The conductors,

trying to make up for lost time, were pushing their steam locomotives to the breaking point, and led travelers into harm’s way. When the accident occurred one conductor was killed outright while the other slowly roasted to death. The images brought to mind the horrors of recent train derailments and how we can be here one minute and gone the next.



As you follow this work you see how the lives of the men lost along with those that survived came together to form the common thread for this book. This thread is how prisoners, guards and suppliers formed the “Business of Captivity.”

The author goes into great detail, compiling primary source material along with excellent writing to bring forth a truly awesome work on Elmira.

The chapters are broken down into easy-to-read sections and build upon each other without dragging the reader through trivial details. The average reader will appreciate this easy-to-read format while the historian will appreciate the

thoroughness of research and detail used in compiling the material for this book.

The myriad of difficulties in running a prison camp as a business are well laid out and it's hard to imagine the daily life-and-death struggle that took place when you begin reading about all the business ventures that took place within the stockade walls.

The most ingenious were the trinkets that were produced by the prisoners to be sold within as well as outside the camp by prison guards. The "Elmira Jewelry Trade" was in full swing and supplied many a lady with finely crafted rings, necklaces, and so forth made from bone, wood, animal hair, or any scrap that might have been missed by a previous "jeweler."

Rounding out this work is the chapter titled "The Aftermath & the Legacy" that lays out in black and white the ultimate cost of prison life. From July 1864 to July 1865, death and sickness became so commonplace that a separate business of transporting and interring the dead sprang up.

One man, an escaped slave, John W. Jones supervised the burial of all the Confederate prisoners at Elmira and made himself a tidy nest egg for after the war. He became known as the wealthiest colored man in that part of the state.

*The Business of Captivity* has brought together sound research mirrored with quality writing to give the reader an enjoyable journey into life at Elmira. Even the endnotes are filled with primary source material and each chapter has many quotes and references.

Cover to cover the reader will discover that human interest has been successfully merged with historical research. I highly recommend this book to anyone curious about fortifications and prisons during the Civil War.

**By Scott C. Anderson**

*Scott C. Anderson has a B.A. in history and M.A. in social sciences from Edinboro University. He has spoken for the Smithsonian Associates, written articles and is a volunteer research librarian at Antietam National Battlefield.*

Source:

<http://www.civilwarnews.com/reviews/bookreviews.cfm?ID=373>

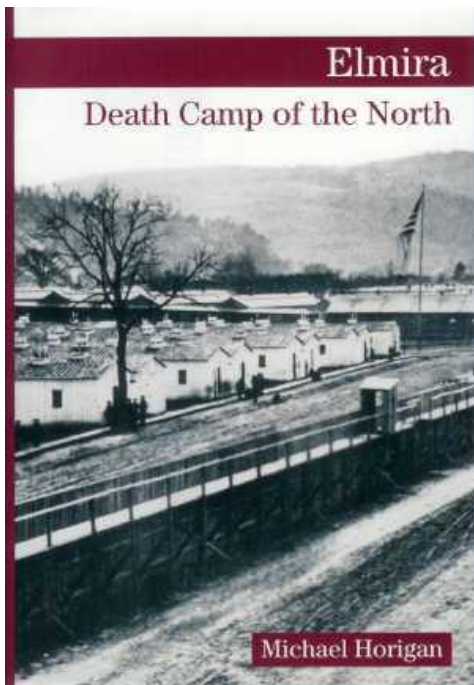


**Elmira: Death Camp of the North** by Michael Horigan. *Illustrated, notes, bibliography, index, 246 pp., 2002. Mechanicsburg, PA Stackpole Books.*

*Elmira: Death Camp of the North* is the first book by high school American History teacher Michael Horigan. In a straightforward manner, he chronicles the political and personal reasons for Elmira having "the highest death rate of any prison camp in the North."

For the most part, Horigan places the blame squarely on the shoulders of Union Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, who, according to the author, oversaw an unstated policy of retaliation for Confederate treatment of Union prisoners of war.

While acknowledging that Andersonville had a higher percentage of fatalities, Horigan states that a breakdown of Confederate transportation infrastructure and the destruction of the South's ability to produce foodstuffs partially explain the high death toll at the Georgia prison. Because Elmira was located in New York far from the scene of fighting and in an area noted early in the war for its excellent transportation network and abundance of food, Horigan finds no similar excuses for what happened in what was officially known as Barracks No. 3 at Camp Chemung.



Horigan supports his hypothesis of a deliberate policy of retaliation with a large amount of circumstantial evidence. “The verifiable facts constitute an enormous haystack,” the author writes, “containing an abundance of tiny needles that reveal damning information.”

One such piece was Secretary Stanton’s call in the spring of 1864 that “precisely the same rations and treatment be from henceforth practiced to the whole number of rebel officers remaining in our hands that are practiced against either soldiers or officers in our service held by the rebels.”

To institute that policy, Stanton selected Col. Benjamin Tracy to replace Lt. Col. Seth Eastman as camp com-mandant in early 1864. Henry Raymond, one of the founders of The New York Times and a supporter of retaliation, championed the choice of Col. Tracy. Through Special Orders No. 336, Tracy effectively curtailed the beef ration at the prison. Tracy also blocked improvements to the prison hospital.

Nonetheless, Horigan notes, Tracy also made efforts to correct the unsanitary condition of a pond within the camp, pushed for construction of additional barracks when it became clear that —

due to overcrowding — many prisoners would have to sleep in tents during the winter, and tried to get additional clothing for the Confederates in the camp, many of whom had nothing but thin summer uniforms.

The attempt to get extra clothing to the prisoners at Elmira provides one of the many interesting stories associated with the camp that Horigan researched. In the summer of 1864, the brother of Confederate Gen. John H. Winder proposed that cotton be shipped from Mobile to New York City in exchange for clothing to be sent to Confederate prisoners. Unfortunately, the cotton did not arrive in New York until the end of January 1865, a month during which 285 prisoners died in Barracks No. 3.

The author also found a connection between the prison camp and the assassination of President Lincoln. In April 1865, a man calling himself John Harrison gained access to Camp Chemung to make sketches. His real task was to determine if the 5,000 Confederates remaining in the camp after prisoner exchanges were again instituted in February 1865 could be freed by means of a mass escape. When news of Lincoln’s death reached Elmira, the man fled to Europe.

“John Harrison” turned out to be John Harrison Surratt, the son of Mary Surratt, executed for her part in the assassination plot. John Surratt was returned to the United States in 1867 and was indicted as a conspirator. His defense was that he was in Elmira at the time, “a claim confirmed by the Elmira clothing clerk who had sold Surratt a suit of clothes on April 13.”

Perhaps the most stunning story chronicled by Horigan concerns some men from the 97th New York. They were caught posing as Confederate prisoners — one can presume — in order to avoid having to fight. The four ended up at Elmira and were once again sent to the front. Either they were sorely misinformed about the conditions at Northern prisons, or they figured their chances were still better in Helmira, as the camp came to be called, than in the line of Confederate fire.

One Union soldier did live in the camp as a prisoner, however. A young man from Owasco, N.Y., served as a spy for the camp authorities. He and a group of Confederate informants helped make Elmira the most secure prisoner-of-war camp in the North, with only 17 escapes during the year of the camp's existence.

Although a map of the Elmira area during the Civil War could have provided some clarity to the discussion about why the town was chosen as a Union depot and later as a prison site, in general Horigan's prose is clear and his arguments compelling.

*Elmira* should serve as a model, along with Benton McAdams's *Rebels at Rock Island*, of the kind of study remaining to be done about several other prison camps, both North and South.

**by Dave Page**

*Dave Page teaches college journalism and most recently contributed several articles to ABC-CLIO's Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military History.*

Source:  
<http://www.civilwarnews.com/reviews/bookreviews.cfm?ID=328>



## DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that Pea Patch Island, located in the Delaware River, was named after a Colonial-era legend that a boat loaded with peas ran aground on a river shoal. The cargo of peas capsized and soon sprouted. Pea Patch Island is the location of Fort Delaware, used as a Confederate prisoner of war camp after the Battle of Gettysburg.

Source: <http://civilwarstudies.org/trivia.shtm#05>



## UPCOMING SCWRT EVENTS

Meeting location for 2013 is Plaza Hof Brau,  
2500 Watt Ave., Sacramento, CA.

- April 10: "Elmira Prison" by Tad Smith
- May 8: "TBA" by Sherri Patton
- June 12: "Attack on the CSS Albemarle", by Tim & Ginny Karlberg
- July 10: "TBA", by Ted Savas,
- Aug 14: "The Capture of New Orleans", by Paul Ruud
- September: "George Custer", by Joe Maxwell
- October: "California Railroads and the Civil War", by William Burg
- November: "The Gettysburg of the West: The 1862 Confederate Invasion of New Mexico" by Don Hayden
- December: "TBA" by Anne Peasley

