



Battle Cry

Founded 1961,
Newsletter of the Sacramento Civil War Round Table
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Remaining Scheduled 2013 SCWRT Meetings

(Second Wednesday of each month)

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

May 8: "TBA" by Sherri Patton

June 12: "Attack on the CSS Albemarle", by Tim & Ginny Karlberg

July 10: "TBA", by Ted Savas,

August 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

Special Events:

[November 1st thru 4th; 2013 West Coast Conference](#)

MINUTES
SACRAMENTO CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE
Wednesday, April 10
Hof Brau Restaurant, 2500 Watt Ave, Sacramento

ATTENDANCE - 33

Members-29

Jim Armstrong	Monica Foxworth	Vivian Miller	Maxine Wollen (Sec)
Roy Bishop	Alan Geiken	Anne Peasley (VP)	John Zasso
Harvey Cain	John Greer	Rick Peasley	
Marsha Cain	Bob Hanley (Pres)	Horst Penning	<u>Guests - 4</u>
Ardith Cnota	Don Hayden (IPP)	Paul Ruud	Esther Beck
Mitchell Cnota	Nina Henley (MAL)	Nancy Samuelson	Larry Spizziri
James Cress	Wayne Henley (MAL)	Richard Sickert	Richard Spizziri
Jerry Cress	Dennis Kohlmann	Roxanne Spizziri	ad Smith
George Foxworth (TR)	Grace Long	Silver Williams (PD)	

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by President Hanley
2. President Hanley led the Pledge and then mentioned that Harvey Cain brought copies for us of an article he has written on HIV/AIDS.
3. The speaker was Tad Smith. His talk was on “Hellmira” aka Elmira Prison. His grandfather had been a prisoner there and after the War, he lived a long life as a Lutheran minister, as a result of his prison experiences. Elmira developed as a military depot due to the railroads that went thru there. It was a major processing center for recruits.
4. The camp could hold 2,000 prisoners; eventually there were 10,000. Rumors were coming north of the poor treatment in southern prisons; a policy of revenge in the north developed. There were not enough barracks for all the prisoners. Some slept in tent and some slept in the open. The water was poor quality and it was also used for bathroom purposes. The prisoners were also on reduced rations, in spite of the fact that the surrounding area was agricultural land.
5. President Hanley thanked Tad Smith for his presentation.
6. There was a discussion regarding the volunteers needed for School Day at Gibson Ranch. So far, there are 14 volunteers & 18 are needed.
7. The meeting was adjourned and a Board Meeting was not held.

Treasurer’s Report

The cash balance at the end of the meeting was \$3,097.73. Thanks to John Zasso, members & guests, the raffle brought in \$53.00

George W. Foxworth, Treasurer



BOOK REVIEWS

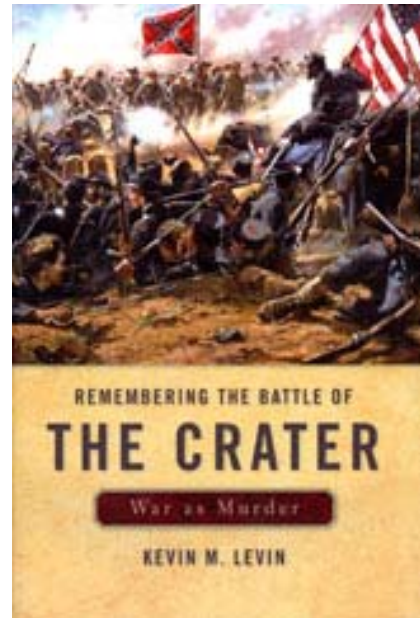


Kevin Levin is quietly reinventing the historical profession. This quest is particularly intriguing because he lacks a Ph.D. (he holds a master's degree in History from the University of Richmond), has never taught a college course at more than an adjunct level, and recently left his teaching position at St. Anne's-Belfield, a boarding school in Charlottesville, Virginia. One thing Levin does have, however, is a blog. Of course, so do a lot of people. But Levin's blog, *Civil War Memory*, is exceptional in its technological savvy, ability to attract advertisers, and the prodigious quantity of content he generates for it.

Of course, none of that would matter if *Civil War Memory* wasn't interesting. But it is, deeply so. Levin writes gracefully and with real insight about race relations, the academic/public divide, and often fiercely contested questions of collective memory, in arenas that range from battlefield sites to popular culture. He's got over a thousand regular followers, and gets almost 50,000 page views a month. Actually, Levin does what what a successful academic scholar is supposed to do: participate in -- and enlarge -- intellectual conversation by drawing on recent research. This was the noble dream at the heart of the creation of the modern university system, but one that has been fitfully realized at best.

People are starting to take notice of Levin. His coverage of a dispute between scholars over their respective books on Mississippi's Jones County during the Civil War got the attention of the *New York Times*, and Levin's work has since appeared there as well as in publications like *The Atlantic*. He typically has a few speaking engagements a month, which in recent months have included talks at the OAH and at Yale. It's a little unclear how, or whether, he's actually making a living from all this, but his editorial work ethic has clearly been paying at least some dividends, figurative or otherwise. Given the contraction in the historical profession, it's hard not to believe what he's doing will

become some form of the norm for anyone who wants to make it in this business. Years from now people will say he showed the way.



This context seems worth reviewing as a prelude to discussing Levin's first book, *Remembering the Crater*, which has just been published as part of the University of Kentucky's "New Directions in Southern History" series. One of the more surprising aspects of this good piece of scholarship is how traditional it is, a brief monograph of the kind you expect from a recent Ph.D. staking a historiographic claim he hopes will land the brass ring of an assistant professorship. The notes section registers the requisite list of visits to archives, the footnotes themselves are rich in primary and secondary sources, and the blurbs come from scholarly heavyweights in Middle Period history like David Blight and Earl Hess. The book effectively ratifies Levin as a switch hitter, a guy who can hold his weight with the old guard even as he pushes out on an electronic frontier. This is high praise (with a few reservations I'll get to shortly).

Levin positions himself squarely in the sub-field of memory, a specialty that emerged about two decades ago, and one in which the Civil War has been a particularly fruitful frame of reference. The point of departure here is Battle of the Crater, which took place on July 30, 1864. The engagement, part of a

rotating wheel of struggle between Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee in 1864-65 for control of Richmond, began as an attempt by the part of the Union army to break the impasse by seizing control of Petersburg, the rail lifeline to the capital of the Confederacy. When an initial attempt to use stealth failed, Federal engineers developed a plan that involved tunneling under Rebel lines, planting thousands of pounds of explosives, and exploiting the confusion that would follow exploding them by sending an offensive to break Southern defenses. A key part of the plan involved using specially trained forces of the United States Colored Troops (USCT), a fraught tactical decision given the racial dimension of the war and recent atrocities against black soldiers by Confederates at Fort Pillow, Arkansas earlier in 1864. Such factors and the racial prejudices against African Americans among Union officers (as well as concern they would be cannon fodder) led to a change of plan that resulted in the USCT participating in, but not leading, the assault. It proved to be a debacle -- the last real Confederate victory in the war. Levin rehearses the military background of the battle skillfully. He does a particularly nice job in his attentiveness to the Petersburg landscape, which puts him on the cutting edge of recent Civil War scholarship.

His real interest, however, is less the battle than the way it has been remembered by subsequent generations in Virginia and elsewhere. At first, the need to avoid antagonizing the victorious federal government led to relatively discreet memorials that acknowledged, if minimized, a black role. But the end of the Reconstruction era brought with it increasingly insistent affirmations of the Lost Cause and an attendant desire to erase African Americans from collective memory, one particularly evident in the 1903 re-enactment of the battle, where black Union participants were entirely absent. (This was an event witnessed by a teenaged Douglas Southall Freeman, and an inspiration for his famous multi-volume biography of Lee.)

Yet such an erasure was not always as easy as one might think. Levin pays particular attention to the career of Brigadier General William Mahone, who led the successful counterattack at the Crater. He later went on to play a major role in postwar Virginia politics, where he collaborated with northern Republicans and Virginia African Americans to

fashion a relatively progressive program that supported state-funded public schools, for example. Mahone's military credentials made it difficult for his critics to assault his credibility, but that didn't stop them from trying -- and ultimately succeeding.

Eventually, however, the long night of Jim Crow was followed by the dawn of the civil rights movement. Media coverage of the struggle for equality peaked during the Civil War centennial, complicating the efforts of segregationists and Civil War traditionalists (who of course were often the same people) and gradually bringing about a more inclusive vision of the war. That sense of inclusiveness involved not only reintegrating the USCT into the story of the Crater and the Civil War generally, but also widening the focus of battlefield study to include more social and cultural history.

In its broadest outlines, this is a familiar story. As Levin acknowledges, it fits squarely in the paradigm of the reconciliationist, white supremacist, and emancipationist phases of post-Civil War history traced by David Blight in his landmark 2001 book *Race and Reunion*. Levin asserts that Blight "does not go far enough in explaining the interplay of race and politics in national reconciliation as well as the deep divisions between former Confederates and white Virginians." Certainly Levin explores some intriguing nuances here; Mahone's career in particular stands out in this regard. But the outcome of the story is plain (and, in the wider context of Southern history, predictable) enough.

One also wonders about the next turn of the wheel. Like most historians of the last half-century, Levin renders this story as one of Progress. There was what really happened, then it got hidden by a bunch of racists, and now the truth has reemerged. Without denying the salutary consequences of writing African Americans back into history -- or endorsing the mindless dead-ender insistence on "heritage," whose advocates never seem to spell out just what they're affirming a heritage *of* -- one wonders if the story is this simple. What are *we* in the process of forgetting these days? How can such absences be traced? Where might the story go from here? These are difficult questions, and it may be unfair to expect Levin to

grapple with them. Perhaps he gets credit for doing so much so well that he provokes them.

A final critique: the subtitle of this book is "war as murder." Yes, the (racial) ferocity of the battle, and the summary executions that followed, make it different than other battles of the Civil War, or other battles in U.S. history generally. And the attempt to forget these atrocities are an essential part of the story. But Levin's larger point is less about the racial violence *per se* than how an event is remembered and gets used for later partisan and/or ideological purposes. It's not so much war as murder as it is war as palimpsest (though "palimpsest" is probably not a great word for the cover of a book for anyone but Gore Vidal).

In any event, *Remembering the Battle of the Crater* is itself a document of a profession in transition. Faithful in his fidelity to traditional scholarship, Levin is a particularly credible and engaging vessel for taking it into the twenty-first century. Long may he wave.

Jim Cullen, who teaches at the Ethical Culture Fieldston School in New York, is a book review editor at HNN.



The Crater as it appeared in 1865. The Union soldiers seated at the end of the tunnel gives an idea of the size of the Crater (Courtesy, National Archives)



The Crater as it appears today. Photo taken on May 3, 2013 by Battle Cry editor.



Entrance to the 511 foot Federal tunnel. Photo taken on May 3, 2013 by Battle Cry editor.



In case anyone missed the Sac Bee article from the weekend's events at Gibson Ranch, below is Sunday's May 5th Sac Bee article.

Battle re-enactment highlight of Civil War Experience Day at Gibson Ranch Published Sunday, May 5, 2013

Thick smoke covered the grassland. The smell of fresh gunpowder lingered in the air.

It was Civil War Experience Day at Gibson Ranch Regional Park in Elverta. About 600 history buffs and Civil War fans converged on the park Saturday to relive the conflict that threatened to destroy the United States. More than 600,000 soldiers died during the war, which lasted from 1861 to 1865.

"Americans were killing Americans," said Andrew Crockett, treasurer for the National Civil War Association, the event organizer. "It's better to settle at the ballot box than with bullets."

A battle between Union and Confederate soldiers was Saturday's highlight.

About 200 re-enactors participated as civilians, soldiers and medics. The re-enactors are all volunteers and purchase their own historical costumes and props, Crockett said.

At 9 years old, Joaquin Cranmore-Sanchez was one of the youngest re-enactors, as a civilian in the Union camp.

"I'm here just for show," Joaquin said, adding that he was looking forward to next year when he will be allowed to serve on the battlefield as an ammo boy. The beating of drums and sounding of bugles signaled the start of the battle. "The Yankees are coming," the announcer said.

As the Union soldiers moved into position, a dozen Confederate sharpshooters aimed their rifles. "Aim and fire," shouted one Confederate officer. The volley of gunfire set off a thick plume of white smoke. Many spectators plugged their ears to block the piercing sounds and sporadic boom of cannon fire. The Confederates retreated when Union reinforcements arrived. Still, the battle went back and

forth, with one side advancing but then, minutes later, retreating.

Such re-enactments are spontaneous and not necessarily coordinated, said Zach Ezzell, 15, dressed as a Union soldier in the 7th West Virginia Volunteer Infantry. Asked how soldiers know when to die, Ezzell replied, "If you find shade, that's a good time to drop dead."

"Every battle will always be different," he said, adding that soldiers aren't told which side will win. While spectators watched from the safety of shade in 88-degree weather, the re-enactors were less fortunate. They were dressed in period costumes, which included bulky dresses, wool socks and four-button sack coats.

Battle re-enactments don't take place without safety risks.

The actors must go through extensive training before they are allowed to engage others on the battlefield. The gunpowder used in rifles can be deadly at very close range, said Jesse Maurier, 18, of Santa Cruz. Maurier started doing re-enactments at age 11, but it wasn't until age 14 that he was allowed to fight and shoot a gun.

Bob Wheatley of Rocklin was busy snapping photos of the skirmish with his two cameras, one mounted on a tripod. The native of England said it was his first time watching an American war re-enactment and that he was "proud to be an American." "This is a talking history book," Wheatley said.

In an odd twist, the 40-minute engagement screeched to a halt after two men mistakenly wandered onto the field. The announcer called out, "Cease fire," and seconds later, all gunfire stopped. At the end of the battle, bodies littered the grass, an obvious reminder of the cost of war. "The bodies," Crockett said, "epitomize the futility of conflict."

By Richard Chang

