



The Sentinel



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The Heroes of Hoover's Gap: John T. Wilder and The Lightning Brigade

Roundtable member Charlie Matson, who spoke to our group on Lincoln and his fascination with arms testing a few years ago, has expanded his "reach" and brought to us this month the story of a Hoosier who took a particular piece of weaponry and carved a legend for himself in the Civil War. This was John Thomas Wilder, who was born in the New York Catskills in 1830, completed school at 19 and headed west to make a life of his own. He settled first in Columbus, Ohio, where he became an apprentice in a foundry and quickly learned drafting, pattern making and the craft of being a millwright.

But Wilder wanted his own business so he relocated to Greensburg, Indiana, where he set up shop, designing and building hydraulic equipment, even receiving a patent on a water turbine. He married into the Stewart family, the founders of Greensburg, and spread his business from Wisconsin to Tennessee, becoming extremely successful.

But when Ft. Sumter was fired upon in April, 1861, Wilder showed his patriotic side by quickly turning to the casting of cannon barrels and by shutting down his lucrative production of hydraulic equipment to start casting bullets for the Union war effort.

But it wasn't so strange that he would give up his successful business dealings to support his country. His great-grandfather Seth lost a leg at Bunker Hill in the revolution and his grandfather, also named Seth, helped his disabled father at Monmouth, Saratoga and Stony Point where he, too, was wounded. John's father, Reuben, was a veteran of the War of 1812. So John did not just want to supply the army, he wanted to join it and lead men into combat even though he had no military training. A commanding physical presence, Wilder tried to form his own artillery battery but it was rejected by the army, so he enlisted in the 1st Independent Battery of Artillery as a private just so he could "get into the fray". His intelligence and bearing got him elected Captain on his second day of service.

His artillery battery was soon converted into an infantry unit, Co. A of the 17th IN, and Wilder was made a Lt. Colonel, reporting to Camp Morton, Indianapolis in May, 1861.

From there, the unit was sent to Maryland, seeing action at Cheat Mountain, Greenbrier River and Elkwater. At the Elkwater, the unit ambushed a Confederate reconnaissance party and severely wounded Col. John A. Washington, a descendant of George Washington. When the Virginian died a few days later, Wilder led an escort to take the body across enemy lines under a flag of truce to the fallen soldier's uncle, Robert E. Lee.

In November, the unit was incorporated into the Army of the Ohio under the command of Don Carlos Buell where it earned commendations from the commander in the siege of Corinth and was one of the few Union units in the war that, after moving through Alabama and into Tennessee, could claim to have routed the forces of Nathan Bedford Forrest.

Peace seemed to elude Wilder, which was probably all right with him. In 1862 he took a furlough home to Greensburg only to have a Confederate cavalry unit invade southern Indiana. Although it made no mention of Wilder specifically, the 1956 Academy Award winning film *Friendly Persuasion* dealt with this raid and its terrifying effect on the area, a part of the north that probably never thought it would see the war brought to their doorsteps. Wilder was instrumental in organizing a 30-day regiment of infantrymen, then put them on horses, and drove the raiders from the state.

Wilder's next exploit occurred when Buell ordered him to reinforce small Ft. Craig near the Green River at Munfordville, KY. There his unit was surrounded by superior forces of Braxton Bragg who were trying to cut off Buell's supply lines from Cincinnati and Louisville. Wilder, when it was suggested by his enemy that surrender would be the wisest thing, made the audacious request of seeing the forces that were facing him to see if the surrender demand was something he should take seriously. Even more amazing was that the Confederates agreed to such a "request", but they did, and Wilder did end up surrendering after confirming that he was "in a bad way". Wilder, himself, was released after only two months.

Next up for Wilder, after his army was morphed into the Army of the Cumberland under William Rosecrans, was to watch the effectiveness of his opponent at one point, John Hunt Morgan, (again) as the leader of an effective, rapidly mobile force. He began to muse on how a brigade, similarly mobile and armed with repeating rifles, could be as effective as an infantry division armed only with standard muzzle loading pieces. Rosecrans, an inventor, businessman and someone always open to new ideas, agreed and gave Wilder orders to organize such a force.

[Cont. on pg. 2]



Charlie Matson before a photo of an older, post-war John T. Wilder.

The new brigade was released to equip itself without aid from the regular army or Washington. The first thing they did was to select hatchets with two-foot handles (see replica picture at right) as their hand-weapon. It could be used for both fighting and constructing fortifications, a very practical weapon over the traditional saber. For a short while, the brigade even earned the moniker “The Hatchet Brigade”.



But the brigade’s biggest claim to fame was the adoption of the seven-shot Spencer repeating rifle. This modern weapon gave them a tremendous firepower advantage over any regularly equipped opponent. Wilder was so convinced of this armament that he convinced his men to each buy their own rifle with loans guaranteed by Greensburg banks, secured with Wilder’s home as collateral.



The “proof of the pudding” came in June of 1863. Bragg, with his forces reduced by having sent some of his men to Vicksburg and some on Morgan’s famous raid on Corydon and North Vernon, IN, now moved on Tullahoma, TN. Here his remaining army was met, at the strategic point of Hoover’s Gap, by Wilder’s 1,400 men and their Spencer rifles. Bragg’s men were turned back in one day with only 51 Union casualties compared to almost 200 for the Confederates. Gen. George Thomas later stated that he estimated it would have taken three days fighting and 2,000 casualties to take this critical spot using conventional weapons.

This small but important victory was overshadowed by the Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in the coming days, so it has gotten little note in the annals of Civil War history. But Wilder’s lightning strike at Hoover’s Gap opened the door for the Union to take control of middle Tennessee, a fact that historians consider one of the *three* fatal wounds inflicted on the South in the first week of July, 1863.

Thomas’ brigade went on to serve with Gen. Thomas, the Rock of Chickamauga, in that Union loss in the fall of 1863. Anyone who has been to the Chickamauga battlefield should remember the Wilder Monument, a 90-foot stone tower on the south section of the field paying homage to the Hoosier and his men who helped Thomas keep the fiasco there from being a total rout.

You might ask why Wilder, such a talented, patriotic and successful Hoosier, is so little known in his home state. Perhaps it is because, shortly after the war, he moved to Chattanooga where he became a noted businessman and civic leader, serving several terms as mayor of that city and setting deep roots in the South, once his mortal enemy. It is interesting to ponder the almost certain fact that he must have, more than once, travelled only a few miles northwest to Hoover’s Gap, or a few miles south to Chickamauga, and relived the days of his military successes as a Union commander. Perhaps this “defection” is why we remember Lew Wallace, Oliver Morton, Eli Lilly and other noted men from Indiana more readily than a man from Greensburg who, arguably, altered forever the way in which wars were fought.

No Substitute for Visual Aids!



Many thanks from Charlie Matson and all of us for the generosity of MCCWR member and collector Bob Willey (above) of New Haven, Indiana, who brought a Spencer repeating rifle and some ammunition from his collection so we could all “lay hands on” for Charlie’s June presentation. There is nothing like feeling the weight of this 9-plus pound weapon to see what a soldier had to deal with, or watching as Bob loaded the seven-shot bullet tube to understand how it worked and why it



was so effective. It should also be noted that Bob did this on the night he was *supposed* to be taking his lovely wife, Marsha, out to dinner for her birthday. Thanks for letting us have him on “your day”, Marsha! We owe you one...and Happy Belated Birthday!

Quote of the Month

“The Spencer rifles made the sweetest music heard during the war for the Union.” - Col. Smith Atkins at a reunion of the 96th Illinois in the 1880’s.

150 Years Ago This Summer

- ◆ Jul 22 Lincoln presents Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet
- ◆ 29 Belle Boyd, CSA spy, captured
- ◆ Aug. 9 Battle of Cedar Mountain, Virginia
- ◆ 13 Skirmish at Yellow Creek, Missouri
- ◆ 15 Skirmish at Clarendon, Arkansas
- ◆ 19 Federal raid on L&N Railroad
- ◆ 24 CSS Alabama commissioned
- ◆ 29 Battle of Second Manassas (Bull Run)
- ◆ 30 Battle of Richmond, Kentucky
- ◆ Sep. 1 Battle of Chantilly, Virginia
- ◆ 2 McClellan restored to command
- ◆ 13 Barton Mitchell and another member of the 27th IN find Lee’s “Lost Order #191” near Frederick, MD.
- ◆ 14 Battle of South Mountain
- ◆ 15 Harpers Ferry captured
- ◆ 17 Battle of Antietam

“Is There a Surgeon in the House?!”

When someone in the Ford’s Theatre audience screamed, “Is there a surgeon in the house?!” the night of April 14, 1865, Dr. Charles A. Leale was the first to reach the stricken President. Now, 147 years later, a researcher with the Papers of Abraham Lincoln has discovered a copy of Dr. Leale’s original, clinical report of the night the 16th President of the United States was shot.

“What is remarkable about this newly discovered report is its immediacy and poignancy. You can sense the helplessness Leale and the other doctors felt that night, but it does not have the sentimentality or added layers of later accounts. It is truly a first draft of history,” said Daniel W. Stowell, director of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln.

A Lincoln researcher came across something unexpected while searching the records of the Surgeon General in the National Archives. She discovered a copy of a twenty-one-page report by Dr. Charles A. Leale, the army surgeon who was the first to reach the presidential box that night. Leale wrote out his story just hours after the President died the next morning, but the text of that first report had remained undiscovered, until now. The newly discovered report is not in Leale’s hand, but is a “true copy” written in the neat and legible hand of a clerk. For nearly a century and a half, it has been tucked away in one of hundreds of boxes of incoming correspondence to the Surgeon General, until recently discovered.

Leale’s report details his actions on that fateful night—arriving at Ford’s Theatre around 8:15 p.m.; finding his seat in the dress circle, about forty feet from the President’s box; seeing the President and his party arrive a few minutes later; hearing the shot; seeing John Wilkes Booth leap to the stage; the ensuing confusion; getting to the Presidential box; Mary Lincoln’s pleas for help; examining the unconscious President and finding his wound; removing a blood clot from the head wound which eased Lincoln’s breathing; conferring with other doctors who had arrived; moving the President to the Petersen house across the street; and remaining there until Lincoln died the following morning at 7:22 a.m.

Charles A. Leale was 23 years old in April 1865, and had received his medical license from the Bellevue Hospital Medical College in New York only six weeks earlier. Despite his youth, Leale was in charge of the Wounded Commissioned Officers’ Ward at the United States Army General Hospital in Armory Square in Washington. Leale had been present outside the Executive Mansion a few nights earlier, not far from John Wilkes Booth, when President Lincoln delivered what became his final speech to a crowd celebrating the surrender of General Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia.

Although a central participant in the drama of Lincoln’s final hours, Leale rarely discussed his role. In July 1867, he sent a version of his report to Benjamin Butler’s Assassination Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives. In the cover letter, Leale told Butler that his account “is principally copied from (a never published) one written by me a few hours after leaving his death bed....” Not until 1909, the centennial of Lincoln’s birth, did Leale give a public, and somewhat embellished, account of his actions. In a speech to the New York Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Leale described that night 44 years earlier. The account was published and has become the standard text of Leale’s actions and role. This article was adapted from a recent news release at (www.presidentlincoln.org).

Want To Get Published?

It may not be Random House or the New York Times, but the roundtable is now accepting articles that will be posted on the organization’s website,



www.mccwrt-in.org, for all to read and enjoy. If you have written something, or would like to, send it to the editor, Steve Rolfe, at the History Center, 202 E. 6th St. or as an attachment to srolfe@indiana.edu. Or maybe you are a past presenter and have your program notes in a form that can be added on the site. We will reserve the right to edit for clarity and condense as needed, but every effort will be made to stay true to the writer’s vision. There a couple of things posted there already, so “drop in”, take a look, then hit the keyboard!

2012 Program Schedule

Jul/Aug	Summer Break– take a CW trip!
Sept. 11	<i>Indiana at Antietam by Civil War historian and guide Ed Bearss.</i>
Oct. 9	<i>Hoosiers in the Mexican War Who Became Leaders in the Civil War</i> by Matt Hoagland
Nov. 13	<i>Confederates Raid Newburgh, IN!</i> by Ray Mulesky
Dec. 11	Annual Holiday Dinner

Next Year’s Roundtable...and Beyond?

“Hoosiers in the Mexican War Who Became Leaders in the Civil War”, “The Confederate Raid at Newburgh, Indiana”, “Christmas During the Civil War”, “The Causes of the End of the Civil War”, “Nathan Bedford Forrest at Fort Pillow”, “Alexander Gardner: Civil War Photographer”, “Political Cartoons in the Civil War”...and the list could go on.

All of the above are upcoming topics of our meeting programs over the next several months. Sound interesting? We hope so. And many of these will be presented by our own members who simply have a particular interest to share with the group. Other presenters are guests from nearby roundtables, history organizations, authors, etc.



Do you have a special moment or person or event during the war? If so, consider doing a program yourself. It’s fun, challenging (although not as much as you might think!) and is a great way to share your passion with others. They don’t have to be long. We can make ten or fifteen minutes work. And even if you have an idea about a program you would like to hear someone *else* speak on, contact our new Program Committee chair, Scott Schroeder, at sts.mccwr@gmail.com or call him at 876-9751 and let him know.



MCCWR Roster of Honor



Capt. Ephraim Waterman Wiley, Co. H, 8th Maine Inf.—Grandfather of former MCCWR President David Wiley. Present or active at Port Royal, Fort Pulaski, Drewry's Bluff, Cold Harbor, Chaffin's Farm, Deep Bottom, Spring Hill, White Oak Road, Fort Gregg, Fort Baldwin, Petersburg and Appomattox.

Sgt. Charles Thomas Shanner, Co. A, 63rd Indiana Volunteer Inf.- Great-grandfather to MCCWR board member John Crosby. Chattanooga-Atlanta Campaign, Clay Springs, Battle of Atlanta.

Col. James McMannomy, Commander, 63rd Indiana Volunteer Inf.- Ancestor of MCCWR member Matt Hoagland. Second Manassas, fought Morgan's Raiders at Shepherdsville, Kentucky.

Pvt. William Nicholas Shiflet, Co. I, 10th Alabama Infantry—2nd Great Grand Uncle to Kevin Shiflet, MCCWR member. Engaged, to some degree, at Dranesville, Yorktown, Williamsburg, Seven Pines, Gaines Mill, Frazier's Farm, Second Manassas, Harpers Ferry, Sharpsburg, Hazel River, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Second Cold Harbor, Petersburg, High Bridge, Farmville and Appomattox. Pvt. Shiflet is only one of a total of seventeen of Kevin's ancestors who served the Confederacy, including thirteen cousins, two third great granduncles and two second great granduncles.

Jacob Mann, Co. A, 16th Iowa Inf.- Ancestor of Allan Sather, MCCWR member. Fought at Resaca, Adairsville, New Hope Church, Kennesaw Mountain, Peachtree Creek, and Bald Hill (Atlanta) where he was captured and sent to Andersonville Prison.

Sgt. Miles M. Oviatt, US Marine Corps- Great grandfather of Mary Pat Livingston, member MCCWR. Served aboard USS Vanderbilt, USS Brooklyn. Fought in Battles of Mobile Bay and Fort Fisher. Commended for Medal of Honor for his service at Mobile Bay. Voyages included south Atlantic, Indian Ocean chasing blockade runners and capturing those renegades ships.

Pvt. Luther Oviatt, Pennsylvania 14th Cavalry, Co. I- Gr-Gr-Gr Uncle of Mary Pat Livingston, member MCCWR. Harper's Ferry, Monocacy Bridge protection of B&O RR. Died at Hammond Hospital, Point Lookout while on duty. Buried Arlington Cemetery.

Pvt. Cyrenas A. Young, 85th New York Infantry, Co K.- Oviatt ancestor of Mary Pat Livingston. Plymouth, Kingston, New Bern, Petersburg, Suffolk. Spent time at Andersonville Prison, then sent to Florence Prison where he died days before the war ended.

Cpl. James Dickson- 10th Wisconsin Infantry, Co. D; 3rd great grandfather of MCCWR member Scott Schroeder. His only real engagement was at the Battle of Perryville where he was killed in action.

Pvt. William Taylor Neville- 8th Iowa Infantry, Co. A; 3rd great grandfather of MCCWR member Scott Schroeder. Engagements: Battle of Shiloh, Vicksburg, Red River Campaign. Captured at Shiloh in the Hornets' Nest. Exch. Oct. '62 and returned to his unit.

Pvt. Reuben Newman—27th Indiana Infantry, Co. I, "Putnam County Grays"- Great-great-grandfather of member Eric Newman. Wounded at Antietam. Also fought at Gettysburg, Winchester, etc. Served Aug. '61-Nov. '64. Died June 13, 1905. Buried in New Providence Cemetery in Putnam County, IN.

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[Anyone is welcome to attend board meetings on the first Tuesday of each month at 11:30 at the History Center.]

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<http://www.mccwrt-in.org/>

150th Anniversary Events Page and More!

[It is the 150th anniversary of the war and there are so many special events scheduled in the upcoming months that we have added this page with anything that might be of interest to members and that are not too distant. If you have material to contribute to this “we-will-publish-it-as-long-as-we-have-stuff” page, send it to Secretary Steve Rolfe at srolfe@indiana.edu]

Civil War Trust 150th Events Site– The Civil War Trust is an excellent resource for information on both the timeline and upcoming events for the Sesquicentennial of the war. Just go to www.civilwar.org/150th-anniversary/150-events/.

The Civil War in Missouri Exhibit– Missouri History Museum, St. Louis– Now thru March, 2013- Explore the story of the Civil War in Missouri. Through documents, objects, and interactive activities you will get a view of this pivotal conflict in an immersive and engaging way only possible here. <http://www.mohistory.org/node/4591>

2012 Battle of Corydon Reenactment- July 6 - 8, 2012 in Corydon , Indiana , just a short drive west of Louisville , KY , off Interstate 64. Hayswood Nature Reserve is the main location of battle reenactment and encampment activities with downtown Corydon hosting a reenactment of Morgan’s raid on the downtown and other events.

Lew Wallace Study and Museum– Crawfordsville, IN, is the home of perhaps the state’s most famous general of the war. Wallace, and the Civil War controversy arising from his division’s “tardiness” during the first day of the Battle of Shiloh, was the subject of his biographer, Gail Stephens, when she spoke at our roundtable last year. You can “read all about it” in her excellent new book *Shadow of Shiloh: General Lew Wallace in the Civil War* which is available in the Monroe County History center gift shop.

Missouri Civil War History– The Secretary of the State of Missouri herself, Robin Carnahan, has requested that we pass along the website for the new digital history collections for the state on-line at <http://www.sos.mo.gov/mdh/CivilWar/Resources.asp#coll>. These include **Community and Conflict: The Civil War in the Ozarks**, **St. Louis Daily Republican Newspaper: 1861-1865** and **St. Louis Area Civil War Digitization Project**.

Kentucky’s Generals- “Kentuckians in the Civil War” is an ongoing exhibit of portraits of prominent native sons of the state who were US and CS generals at the Battle of Richmond Visitors’ Center I Richmond, KY. Contact phillip.seyfrit@madisoncountky.us.

“To Kill and To Heal: Weapons and Medicine of the Civil War”– Through 2013 at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum, Springfield, Ill. Artifacts include hospital flags, a field stretcher, a door used as a surgical table, weapons, medical tools, a leg prosthesis, letters, clinical photos and medical records. See www.presidentlincoln.org.

“Hallowed Ground: A Lantern Tour of Stones River National Cemetery”– July 7 & 21, Aug. 4 & 18, Murfreesboro, TN. Call 615-893-9501 or go to www.nps.gov/srnc.

Encampment at James A. Garfield national Historic Site– Mentor, Ohio– July 14-15. Re-enactors, hourly programs, firing demonstrations, children’s area. Call 440-205-3827 or email scott_longert@nps.gov.

18th Annual Galesburg Heritage Days– Aug. 17-19 at Lake Storey Park, Galesburg, Ill.—Battles both days, period fashion show, ladies’ tea, camp dance, artillery night firing. 309-337-3308 or www.galesburgheritagedays.com.

Richmond, KY, 150th Battle Re-enactment– August 25-26– Partly staged on original battlefield. This was Kentucky’s second-largest battle of the war after Perryville. 859-248-1974 or www.battleofrichmond.org.

Battle of Middle Creek Re-enactment– Sept. 7-9– Prestonsburg, KY. Battles both days, dance after free Saturday supper; cannon; infantry. Email adjutant@friendsofmiddlecreek.org or go to www.friendsofmiddlecreek.org.

Chicagoland National Civil War and Military Collectors’ Show– Sept. 15th– DuPage County Fairgrounds, Wheaton, ILL. 715-526-9769 or go to www.zurkopromotions.com.

Michigan Civil War Muster– Holland Museum, Holland, MI. 616-796-3329 or go to www.hollandmuseum.org.

Camp Nelson Civil War Days, Kentucky– Original Union supply depot and recruiting camp– Living History, skirmish– 859-881-5716 or go to www.campnelson.org.

[Remember, if you have information to include here, or anywhere in The Sentinel, send it to editor Steve Rolfe at srolfe@indiana.edu.]

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