

MONROE COUNTY CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

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COL. WILLIAM OATES OF ALABAMA

Member Dick Worsena brought his long-held interest in one of the “asterisks” of the Battle of Gettysburg to the October meeting with his fascinating exposition on the 15th Alabama’s Col. William Oates (right), the commander of the unit charged with attacking the left flank of the Union defensive line on Little Round Top on July 2, 1863. Aside from his brief moment of fame facing the 20th Maine, Oates was a figure of interest even before the war and certainly long after it ended.

Oates described himself as having been “born in poverty” and “raised in adversity” in his native state. Forced to leave home at the age of 16 after a scrape with the law, he labored as an itinerant house painter but nevertheless managed to gain an education and become a practicing attorney before volunteering in 1861. He used the skills gained in his training and education to fashion a fierce and efficient fighting unit when he became the Colonel of the 15th.

As most know, Oates led his men down the slopes of Round Top, charging to the north and attempting to outflank the Union lines on their left flank. After

numerous charges that were determinedly repulsed by a gallant group of men from Maine, a force led by the now almost legendary Bowdoin College professor Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain (left), Oates and his men failed to gain the advantage and many say, the ultimate triumph in the battle.

Years after the battle, Oates himself critiqued the effort and recounted the many lost “ifs”. What if he had been left to hold the excellent defensive position of Round Top with entrenched artillery rather having been ordered to make the ill-fated charge? What if he had had just one more regiment when he assaulted the boys from Maine? What if his troops had not been desperate for fresh water, a lack that cost him 22 of his best men in the assault? These “ifs” would haunt Oates for the rest of his life but would not deter him from future success.



Join Dick Worsena in May as he concludes his look at Oates, concentrating on the end results of the July 2nd conflict and the illustrious life of this unique southerner who would go to great fame in his state as a lawyer, politician and leader.

TO BE CONTINUED ON MAY 8TH, 2007...

The Indiana Historical Society History Train to be in Columbus Oct. 26-28

This unique event which first came to our area in the fall of 2004 returns with an all new traveling exhibiton, *Faces of the Civil War*. Come to the Bartholomew County fairgrounds in Columbus to explore Indiana’s role in the Civil War with dozens of images from the collections of the Indiana Historical Society.

The train is open to visitors from 9 am until 6 pm all three days. There is no admission charge, free parking is available nearby and reservations are required only for large groups. Individuals and families can just “walk-on”. There will be many activities and exhibits in addition to the three refurbished railroad cars holding the “main event”. For more information call 800-447-1830 or log on to www.indianahistory.org/historytrain.

Civil War Medicine Highlighted in November

Join the roundtable circle on November 14th for an insider’s look at Civil War medicine when Indianapolis resident Frederick Schaefer comes to Bloomington to share his insights in this often overlooked aspect of the war, but one which has been gaining momentum as a topic of interest with the opening of the National Museum of Civil War Medicine in Frederick, Maryland.

Parts of Libby Prison Sold at Auction

The estate of local Monroe County native Rod Wampler was auctioned on October 7th. Some unique Civil War-related items that were auctioned were some 123 floor joists from Libby Prison, the infamous Confederate prison in Richmond, Virginia. Bought by a history lover for \$8,500, it is thought that some of the pieces will be preserved as artifacts. Some will be distributed to other enthusiasts and others kept by the buyer. Civil War fans were pleased that the sale went to someone dedicated to preserving the memories contained in these artifacts.

Little known fact: Senator John J. Crittendon of Kentucky had two sons who became major generals in the war—one for the north and one for the south.

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