



# SOUTH BAY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

## South Bay Civil War Roundtable Meeting Minutes October 29, 2019

**Meeting Location:** Holder's Country Inn – Cupertino, CA

### **Special Activities & Events:**

#### **2019 West Coast Civil War Conference**

- Date: November 8-10, 2019
- Location: Crowne Plaza Sacramento Northeast, 5321 Date Avenue, Sacramento, CA 95841-2512
- Theme: Civil War Leadership: The Strategy, Tactics, and Politics of a Country Torn Asunder
- Event Link: <https://www.savasbeatie.com/savas-beatie-blog/2019-west-coast-civil-war-conference-in-sacramento-featuring-two-major-savas-beatie-authors/>

#### **Civil War Reenactment**

- Date: November 9-10, 2019
  - Location: The Johnston House 110 Higgins Canyon Rd Half Moon Bay, CA
- Host: National Civil War Association
- Event Link: <https://www.visithalfmoonbay.org/events/civil-war-reenactment>

### **Officer Reports**

#### **President**

- Thanked Marilyn Comstock for hosting annual picnic
- \$500 Lump Sum Book Purchase from Dana Lombardy – Tabled pending results of request to membership to donate any spare Civil War books for the Book Raffle event

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- Holder's Country Inn Meeting Room Fee:
  - Agreement with Holder's in order to avoid paying fee for room, the restaurant needs to collect a minimum of \$200 in meal/refreshment proceeds; the October 29<sup>th</sup> meeting fell short of this amount
  - For members who dine at Holder's, they are requested to have meals served in meeting room as part of SBCWRT event and not in main restaurant so their meal cost is included towards \$200 room requirement
- Presentation Logistics:
  - The slide presentation of October meeting failed due to the inability to connect the presenter's computer to the screen projector
  - For future presentations that include slides, presenters will be requested to have their slide presentation stored on a flash drive as a backup in the event a similar technical connectivity problem occurs
  - Purchase by the SBCWRT of an inexpensive laptop for presentations will be discussed at a future meeting

### **Vice President**

No Report

### **Treasurer**

- Bank Account: Approximately \$3270
- Reminded that 2019-20 membership fees are due
- Picnic Cost: \$141

### **Secretary**

- Distributed September meeting minutes
- Civil War Quiz: "Ripley's" Believe It or Not About The Civil War? Dixon Porter and David Farragut?
- \$35 collected for book raffle
- Meeting Attendance: Total: 19

### **Preservation**

- Reminded membership of SBCWRT policy to match up to \$500 donations to various Civil War battlefield trust efforts
- Announced the passing of former SBCWRT member Steve Wetlesen; contact Bill Noyes regarding attendance at Memorial service planned for January 2020

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## **Historian**

Vacant

### **This Day in the Civil War: October 29 (By Abby Eller)**

**1861:** Union naval expedition leaves Hampton Roads, VA under the command of Union Genl Thomas Sherman and Flag Officer Samuel DuPont. Fleet of 77 vessels carries 12k men, one of the largest military forces yet assembled by the United States.

**1862:** Genl McClellan's Army of the Potomac moves towards Warrenton, VA; causes Genl Robert E Lee to move south to prevent from being encircled. Meanwhile, there is skirmishing at Snicker's Gap.

**1863:** Union artillery batteries send over 2600 shells into Ft Sumter, killing 33 Confederate defenders; the fort did not surrender.

**1864:** Genl Nathan Bedford Forrest captures Union steamer Mazeppa on the Tenn River, near Ft Henry. Meanwhile, Genl John Bell Hood anticipates Forrest will join up with his forces, as Hood moves westward to invade Tenn

### **Person of the Month: Cornelius Vanderbilt (By Abby Eller)**

#### **Background**

- Cornelius Vanderbilt was of Dutch ancestry; his forebears came to New Amsterdam in the 17th century as indentured servants
- Starting at age 11, worked on his father's ferryboat service in New York City harbor; at 16, started own ferry service
- When he became business manager for Thomas Gibbon's ferry service, learned how to operate a large, complex transportation business
- After Gibbon's death, took over ferry service, acquired other ferry services, took over railroads connecting New York and Boston harbors to New England cotton mills
- During the Calif Gold Rush, further expanded into the oceangoing steamship business.
- Created business empire of ship fleets and railroad lines that vastly expanded the US transportation infrastructure
- An American business magnate made him one of the three wealthiest men in American history along with Andrew Carnegie and John D Rockefeller
- Was tough minded, tightfisted unsentimental man, renowned for driving a hard bargain, and notorious for trusting no one
- Not imagined as a benefactor, made magnanimous donations to the North during the Civil War, and to the South during Reconstruction.

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## **Civil War**

- At outbreak of the Civil War, Vanderbilt offered his largest steamship, the SS Vanderbilt, to the US Navy. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles refused, thinking it would be too costly to acquire and operate.
- When Confederate ironclad Merrimac wreaked havoc with Union blockade ships at Hampton Roads VA, Vanderbilt again offered his ship; President Lincoln asked the price. Vanderbilt bristled at the implication that he was a wartime profiteer and insisted on donating his ship.
- The SS Vanderbilt, a transatlantic steamer was one of the largest, heaviest and fastest ships afloat; was capable of speeds up to 14 knots
- Secretary of War Edwin Stanton wrote orders deeming Vanderbilt “discretion and authority to use the ship as you deem fit.”
- Vanderbilt equipped the ship with 14 guns, a ram mounted on the bow, and a handpicked combat ready crew and the SS Vanderbilt promptly halted operations of the Merrimac at Hampton Roads
- Vanderbilt converted the ship to a cruiser to hunt down Confederate commerce raider Alabama; the Alabama eluded the Vanderbilt and other pursuers, until finally sunk by USS Kearsarge in June 1864 off the coast of France
- The SS Vanderbilt did capture several other ships, blockade runners, and was finally decommissioned in 1866.

## **Post Civil War**

- Cornelius Vanderbilt was born and bred a Yankee, and had obviously proven himself a Union patriot
- Surprisingly, after the Civil War, he put up bail money to get Jefferson Davis out of prison
- Vanderbilt’s second wife, a native of Mobile Alabama, persuaded him to found an institute of higher education to help the South recover from the devastation left by the Civil War.
- With an endowment of \$1 Million dollars, the largest charitable contribution in US history up to that time, Vanderbilt brought into being Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn; this day it remains a top university not only in the South, but the entire US.
- Cornelius Vanderbilt, in helping the North win the Civil War, and afterwards helping the South recover, in his generosity to North and South alike, showed himself to be a true American patriot.

## **Other Topics**

**None**

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## **October Presentation**

Speaker: Gary Yee

Topic: Port Hudson

## **November Presentation**

Speaker: Tom Roza

Topic: If the South Had Won the Civil War

## **December Presentation**

No Meeting