



SOUTH BAY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

South Bay Civil War Roundtable Meeting Minutes December 29, 2020

Meeting Location: Online via ZOOM Meeting Application

Special Activities & Events:
None

Officer Reports

President

Trip to Fort Point

- Suggested group outing to visit historical Fort Point in San Francisco
- Fort Point is a masonry seacoast fortification located on the southern side of the Golden Gate at the entrance to San Francisco Bay
- The fort was completed just before the American Civil War by the United States Army, to defend San Francisco Bay against hostile warships. The fort is now protected as Fort Point National Historic Site
- The site is currently closed due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic; once the site is re-opened and the Pandemic has been controlled, a date for the outing will be scheduled

Vice President

No Report

Treasurer

- Bank Account: \$3,267 (as reported last month)

Secretary

- December meeting minutes posted on SBCWRT web site
- Civil War Quiz: What Do You Know About Civil War Cavalry?
- Book Raffle: N/A
- Meeting Attendance: Total: 12

Preservation

No Report

Historian

Vacant

This Day in the Civil War: December 29th

1860: John Floyd, former governor of Virginia, resigns position as Secretary of War in President Buchanan's Cabinet. Historians still debate to what extent Floyd attempted to covertly ship arms to Southern arsenals after Lincoln's election. When Floyd proposed removal of Federal troops from Charleston South Carolina, President Buchanan requested his resignation.

1861: Martial law declared in St Louis , MO. Skirmishing in Clay, Braxton and Webster counties in West Virginia. Skirmishing in Indian Territory (now state of Oklahoma) between pro-Union Creeks and pro-Confederate Choctaws, Chickasaws, Seminoles and Cherokees.

1862: Sherman's troops fight Battle of Chickasaw Bayou to gain bluffs north of Vicksburg; unable to take bluffs by frontal assault. Meanwhile, outside Murfreesboro, TN, heavy fighting between forces of Bragg & Rosecrans.

1863: US Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells writes in his diary, "The year closes more satisfactorily than it commenced" In contrast, Richmond Examiner newspaper describes past year as "the gloomiest year of our struggle." Skirmishing at Waldron, AR; in Coldwater, MS and Mossy Creek, TN, and on Matagorda Peninsula in Texas.

1864: As Franklin-Nashville Campaign in Tennessee winds down, skirmishes around Pond Springs, AL. Meanwhile in the Indian Ocean, the CSS Shenandoah captures and destroys unarmed US ship Delphine, after taking the ship's cargo of rice. This is the ninth US vessel captured and destroyed in eight weeks, by the Confederate privateers.

Person of the Month: Gideon Welles: Lincoln's "Father Neptune"

Background

- Gideon Welles, born in 1802 in Connecticut, was Secretary of the US Navy from 1861 to 1869
- Educated at academies in Connecticut and Vermont, Welles became a lawyer, newspaper editor, and served in the Connecticut House of Representatives from 1827-1835
- Went on to serve in various government posts including Chief of the Bureau of Provisions and Clothing for the US Navy, from 1846 to 1849.
- Initially a Democrat, Welles joined the antislavery Free Soil Party in 1848, and in 1854, the Republican Party

- His strong support for Lincoln in the 1860 Presidential election, plus his administrative experience, led Lincoln to appoint Welles to his Cabinet as Secretary of the Navy.

During Civil War

- Was instrumental in creating the Navy Medal of Honor.
- In 1861, Welles found the Navy Department in chaos because so many Southern Naval officers and administrators had resigned.
- Welles had to rebuild the Navy Dept and quickly in order to implement the blockade of the Confederacy ordered by Lincoln.
- Oversaw the Union blockade of Confederate ports and coastline during the Civil War
- Initially objected to the blockade; nevertheless, he carried it out with determination and outstanding leadership.
- Welles was a talented administrator, a good judge of character; he assembled an excellent department team, including assistant secretary Gustavus Fox and Navy Yard commandant John Dahlgren
- By close of the Civil War, the US Navy had expanded from 76 vessels and 7600 seamen, to 671 vessels and 51,000 seamen; Navy's effectiveness in enforcing the blockade was a major factor in the defeat of the Confederacy.
- During the Civil War, Navy enlisted fugitive slaves and free blacks just as soon as they offered their services; was less controversial than enlisting these men in Union Army; unlike the Army, the Navy did not invade Confederate territory; seamen were not issued firearms.
- To the Navy's credit, during the Civil War black seamen right from the start, received equal pay and provisions as white seamen.
- Welles kept a diary during the Civil War which would provide historians much valuable detail about the daily workings of Lincoln's Cabinet, and interesting observations about Welles's fellow Cabinet members
- At times Welles clashed with other Cabinet members, but remained steadfastly loyal to Lincoln; whatever complaints he had about Lincoln, he kept private in his diary
- In turn, Lincoln appreciated Welles's loyalty and what the US Navy had accomplished during the war
- When Andrew Johnson became President, he retained Welles in his Cabinet; was publicly loyal to Johnson; however, he expressed much dismay in his diary about Lincoln's successor.

Post Civil War

- After leaving office, Welles returned to his native Connecticut where he wrote several books and edited his memoirs in his remaining years

- Since then, two Navy ships have been named in his honor, as well as the Gideon Welles School in Welles's birthplace, Glastonbury Connecticut.

Other Topics

Tom McMahon: Book donation activity

December Presentation

Speaker: Jim Rhetta

Topic: Bad Civil War Generals - Confederates: Part 2

January Presentation

Speaker: David Dixon

Topic: "The American Civil War: A Radical, International Revolution"

February Presentation

Speaker: Alan Sissenwein

Topic: Bad Civil War Generals - Union: Part 3