



# **SOUTH BAY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE**

## **South Bay Civil War Roundtable Meeting Minutes November 24, 2020**

**Meeting Location:** Online via ZOOM Meeting Application

**Special Activities & Events:**  
None

### **Officer Reports**

#### **President**

##### **New Members/Guests**

- Don Christian (New Member)
  - Interest in Almaden quick silver mines and connection to Civil War
  - Discovered SBCWRT and decided to become a member
  - Has been a student of general history for a long time
- Nick Stern (Guest)
  - Long time friend of Alan Sissenwein
  - Also has interest in Civil War

##### **December Meeting**

- Tuesday Dec 29<sup>th</sup> 7pm via ZOOM
- Approved by membership
- Presentation will be Part 2 of “Worst Generals of the Civil War”

#### **Vice President**

No Report

#### **Treasurer**

- Bank Account: Approximately \$3,267
- Payments made for Meetup fee and Speaker Honorarium

## **Secretary**

- October meeting minutes posted on SBCWRT web site
- Civil War Quiz: What Do You Know About Generals to Politicians and Politicians to Generals? by Mark Costin
- Book Raffle: N/A
- Meeting Attendance: Total: 18

## **Preservation**

No Report

## **Historian**

Vacant

### **This Day in the Civil War: November 24th**

**1861:** Maj Robert Anderson, in command at Ft Moultrie in Charleston, SC, reports Charleston has determined to leave the Union. “The storm may break upon us at any moment.” The present garrison at Ft Moultrie is so weak as to be defenseless if attacked. In contrast, Ft Sumter, not yet garrisoned, is favorably located on an island in Charleston harbor. Anderson favors garrisoning Ft Sumter at once.

**1862:** In Georgia, Federal forces land on Tybee Island in the Savannah River attacking Ft Pulaski which defends the city of Savannah. In Washington, President Lincoln and his Cabinet confer on what to regarding controversial seizure from British ship Trent of Confederate ambassadors to Britain and France, George Mason & John Slidell. Skirmishing at Johnson, MO

**1863:** Confederate General Joseph Johnston is assigned major command in the West, covering western North Carolina, Tennessee, and parts of northern Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and eastern Louisiana. Skirmishing at Newton Virginia and Beaver Creek Missouri.

**1864:** In Georgia, Sherman continues his March to the Sea from Milledgeville to Savannah. In Columbia, TN, Nathan Bedford Forrest’s cavalry, leading General Hood’s army, is driven off by Federals led by General Jacob Cox. In Washington, Attorney General Edward Bates resigns from Lincoln’s Cabinet. Skirmishes in St Charles Arkansas and near Prince George Courthouse in Virginia.

### **Person of the Month: Roger B Taney, Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court 1836-1864**

#### **Background**

- Born in 1777 into wealthy slaveholding family in Maryland, Roger B Taney was admitted to the Maryland bar in 1799

- Promptly established successful legal practice;
- In light of what came later, it's interesting to note that in 1819, Taney successfully defended an abolitionist Methodist minister who had denounced slavery at his camp meetings; in arguing the case, Taney declared slavery to be "a blot on our national character."

### **Jurist**

- Now widely respected as a jurist, Taney became Maryland State Attorney General in 1827
- Joined Democratic Party, and went on to serve as President Andrew Jackson's Attorney General
- When US Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall died in 1836, Jackson appointed Taney to succeed him.
- In the 1850's, Congress was unable to settle the growing sectional conflict over slavery; the Presidency was no more effective; Americans asked, could the Supreme Court somehow settle the slavery issue?

### **Dred Scott Decision - 1857**

- In 1851, Taney wrote majority opinion in Supreme Court decision *Strader v Graham*, wherein Court ruled against slaves who's filed suit for their freedom, because they had voluntarily returned to the slave state of Kentucky, after spending time in the free state of Ohio.
- In 1846, the slave Dred Scott filed suit against his master for his freedom, claiming he's legally gained his freedom in the 1830's, because he'd been taken to live for a time in the free state of Illinois, and in US territory closed to slavery by the Missouri Compromise of 1820
- Case reached US Supreme Court in 1856.
- It's strongly suspected newly elected President James Buchanan privately pressured Chief Justice Taney to write a decision that would "settle" the slavery issue once and for all. (If this in fact occurred, it was extremely improper, then as now, for the Chief Executive to influence the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.)
- Two days after Buchanan's inauguration, the Supreme Court ruled 7-2 against Dred Scott, citing the *Strader v Graham* precedent
- In his ruling, Taney stated Constitution was never meant to include people of color as citizens, whether they were enslaved or free; therefore, these people had no legal rights or privileges
- Taney declared the Missouri Compromise which had limited spread of slavery as unconstitutional because it violated the right of property owners to take any property, be it furniture or slaves, where they pleased
- In sum, the Dred Scott decision wiped out the distinction between free and slave states, by empowering slaveholders to keep slave property anywhere they wanted; no more would any slaveholder have to deal with

slave suing for freedom. And now, even free people of color in the US could be forcibly enslaved without hope of legal recourse.

- Predictably, decision was greeted with rejoicing in the South and horror in the North; galvanized the growth of the new Republican Party, firmly committed to stopping the expansion of slavery and “setting it on the road to extinction.”
- Taney and Buchanan were dreadfully mistaken in presuming the ruling on Scott v Sanford would “settle” the slavery issue.

### **During the Civil War**

- In case after case Taney challenged Lincoln’s expansion of Federal and Executive power
- In response, Lincoln prevailed by turning to Congress to authorize his measures.

### **Epilogue**

- Taney died Oct 12, 1864, the same day his home state passed an amendment to the state constitution abolishing slavery in Maryland
- In 1993 the Roger B Taney Middle School in Temple Hills Maryland was renamed in honor of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall
- In 2017, the state of Maryland removed the statue of Taney from the grounds of the Maryland State House.
- His place in American history has been defined by his ruling in Scott v Sanford, better known as the Dred Scott decision
- Unanimously denounced ever since as the worst US Supreme Court decision ever, it was one of the immediate causes of the Civil War.

### **Other Topics**

None

### **November Presentation**

Speaker: Alan S and Jim R

Topic: Bad Civil War Generals: Part 1

### **December Presentation**

Speaker: Alan S and Jim R

Topic: Bad Civil War Generals: Part 2

### **January Presentation**

Speaker: David Dixon

Topic: “The American Civil War: A Radical, International Revolution”