



SOUTH BAY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

South Bay Civil War Roundtable Meeting Minutes February 23, 2021

Meeting Location: Online via ZOOM Meeting Application

Special Activities & Events:

None

Officer Reports

President

No Report

Vice President

No Report

Treasurer

- Bank Account: \$2,885

Secretary

- January meeting minutes posted on SBCWRT web site
- Civil War Quiz: What Do You REALLY Know about Edmund Ruffin?
- Book Raffle: Suspended
- Meeting Attendance: Total: 11

Preservation

No Report

Historian

Vacant

This Day in the Civil War: February 23rd

1861: President elect Lincoln arrives safely in Washington at 6am, after following a secret travel plan to elude possible assassins. After conferring with William Seward at Willard's Hotel, Lincoln calls on President

Buchanan and his Cabinet at the White House. Afterwards, visitors flock to Willard's Hotel to greet the new President.

1862: Citizens of Nashville, TN flee in panic as Federal gunboats draw close to the city. In Washington, President Lincoln names Andrew Johnson as Military Governor of Tenn. Federal troops occupy Fayetteville, AR.

Fighting around Pea Ridge Prairie, MO. Dept of the Gulf is created, under Maj General Benjamin Butler

1863: An engagement at Ft Caswell, NC, and an incident at Athena, KY. At Berwick Bay, LA, the USS Kinsman transporting Federal troops, strikes a sunken log and quickly sinks; 6 men are lost

1864: Federal troops of General Thomas's Army of the Cumberland under Maj Genl JM Palmer, attack Joe Johnston's position at Dalton, GA. Federals scout from Springfield, Mo to northern Arkansas, fighting several skirmishes

1865: Union Admiral Dahlgren sends Capt Henry Stellwagen, USS Pawnee, with a squadron of gunboats to occupy Georgetown, SC and establish a link with Sherman's forces now approaching the North Carolina border

Person of the Month: Frederick Douglass and his Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, as Written by Himself

Background

- The chief cause of the Civil War was conflict over the future of slavery in America. In the years leading up to the Civil War, abolitionists insisted slavery was a great moral evil that must end without delay
- But white laborers did not want to compete for wages with freed slaves. And whites in the slave states feared they'd be murdered if the slaves were set free
- Racism in North and South alike meant there was little sympathy for slaves' lot in life. To be an abolitionist could be deadly dangerous. Nevertheless, abolitionists courageously sought to rouse the conscience of America by publicizing the realities of slavery, particularly the accounts of escaped slaves
- Unfortunately, out of fear of recapture the authors of these accounts as a rule stayed anonymous, and did not identify names, places or dates. Which made it easy to dismiss these accounts as "fake news."

Frederick Douglass

- Frederick Douglass was born a slave in 1818 on a farm in Maryland. He succeeded in escaping to freedom in 1838, married and settled in the town of New Bedford Mass
- In 1845 he had escaped from slavery to Massachusetts, published his first autobiography, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, as Written by Himself

- With a few exceptions, Douglass did name names, places and dates. And, he mailed a copy of the Narrative to his master Thomas Auld, and publicly challenged Auld to refute it. This convinced readers that the Narrative was authentic; it sold well enough to launch the career of Frederick Douglass as an abolitionist, and helped fund the purchase of his freedom
 - His Narrative concludes with how he became committed to the abolitionist movement. In his Narrative, Douglass had much to say about how degrading and ruinous to good character slavery could be, for slave and master alike. And what it felt like to be treated as property
 - Douglass unsparingly described the physical and emotional cruelties inflicted on slaves. Even if a slave was fortunate enough to be well treated, what he worked for could never be his.
 - For example, Douglass was hired out by Hugh Auld (his master's brother), to work in a Baltimore shipyard. Douglass handed over every penny he earned to master Hugh, "not because he earned it, but solely because he had the power to compel me to give it up." Master Hugh did give his slave a few pennies from these earnings. Douglass had to act grateful, otherwise Hugh Auld would've been angry at his slave failing to appreciate his "generosity."
 - Douglass accomplished something extraordinary for a slave: He learned how to read and write. In 1828 at the age of 8, he was sent to the home of Hugh and Sophia Auld, to look after their little son
 - Douglass recalled, "Going to live at Baltimore...opened the gateway to all my subsequent prosperity. I have ever regarded it as the first plain manifestation of the kind Providence which has ever since attended me."
 - Sophia Auld, unfamiliar with the unwritten code of master-slave relations, was kind to young Douglass and taught him how to read simple words. When Mr. Auld found out, he reprimanded her, saying "it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read. A slave should know nothing but to obey his master." Literacy "will forever unfit him to be a slave." Douglass overhears this: "These words...called into existence an entirely new train of thought...From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom."
 - Douglass in fact appreciated Mr. Auld for unwittingly enlightening him about the power of literacy. So when Douglass was sent on errands, he secretly would take a book and pieces of bread. He made friends with poor, hungry white boys in the streets; in return for bread to eat, they showed him how to read.

- Douglass refrained from naming these boys, lest they be known for having committed “the unpardonable offense” of teaching a slave to read. Douglass longed for freedom; he learned from newspapers that slaves escaped to the North for freedom.
- Douglass now taught himself how to write, beginning by watching workmen write letters on lumber in a shipyard. He secretly practiced penmanship from discarded copybooks brought home by Thomas Auld, now a schoolboy.
- Douglass did not divulge how he escaped to freedom in 1838. For had he described how he did so, it might make it difficult if not impossible for other slaves to escape as he did.
- During his first 3 years in New Bedford, MA, Douglass gladly took whatever work he could get, regardless of how hard or dirty. The wages he earned, were now his to keep
- He subscribed to the abolitionist newspaper The Liberator: “its sympathy for my brethren in bonds-its scathing denunciations of slaveholders-its faithful exposures of slavery-and its powerful attacks upon the upholders of the institution-sent a thrill of joy through my soul.”
- He started attending abolitionist meetings, and was invited to speak. Pleasantly surprised at how easily he did well as a public speaker, Douglass now devoted himself to “pleading the cause of my brethren” as public speaker, author, and newspaper publisher

During Civil War

- By the outbreak of the Civil War, Frederick Douglass was nationally famous. He used his prominence to recruit black troops for the Union Army

Post Civil War

- After the Civil War, among other things he served in a series of public offices, including US Marshal of the District of Columbia, recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia, and US consul general to Haiti, and he continued his career as an author and public speaker until shortly before his death in 1895
- A statue in Rochester NY commemorates Douglass, as does The Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge in Washington DC, and postage stamps issued by the US Postal Service; many schools have been named after Douglass, and colleges and universities have posthumously awarded him honorary degrees
- In 1999 Yale University established the Frederick Douglass Book Prize for works on the history of slavery and abolition.

Other Topics

Jean Libby

- Study of the Civil War online program at the George Tyler Moore Center in Shepherdstown, VA on March 25

Bob Hubbs

- Long time SBCWRT member and Past President passed away

Tom McMahon

- Commented favorably on the book donated by the January presenter David Dixon "The American Civil War: A Radical, International Revolution"

February Presentation

Speaker: Alan Sissenwein

Topic: Bad Civil War Generals - Union: Part 3

March Presentation

Speaker: Tom Roza

Topic: 1868 Impeachment Trial of President Andrew Johnson

April Presentation

Speaker: Mark Costin

Topic: 1864 General Sterling Price Raid