



SOUTH BAY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

South Bay Civil War Roundtable Meeting Minutes October 25, 2022

Meeting Location: Denny's Restaurant located at 2077 N First St, San Jose, CA 95131 and via ZOOM

Note: The November, 2022 meetings will also be held at this Denny's

NOTE: THE HOLDER'S COUNTRY INN ON DE ANZA BLVD IN SAN JOSE, CA WAS DESTROYED BY FIRE ON JULY 27, 2022. A SEARCH FOR A NEW MEETING LOCATION IS IN PROGRESS

Special Activities & Events:

2022 West Coast Civil War Round Table Conference

Date/Time: November 4th (5:00) Thru 6th (Noon), 2022

Theme: "Combat Strategy and Tactics in 1864 Virginia, Grant VS Lee in 1864."

Host: San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table

Location: Wyndham Garden Fresno Airport
5090 E. Clinton Way, Fresno
(559-252-3611) \$103 per night.

Event URL: <http://www.sjvcwrt2.com/events.html>

Attendee Registration: \$200 Per Person including meals (Breakfast on your own; coffee & pastries provided.) (Non participants who wish Dinner Fri or Sat Night: \$30 each meal)

Questions? Email: ronvaughan@prodigy

Officer Reports

President

- **Future Meeting Location Plans**
 - Contact Holders Country Inn on Status of Restaurant
 - Determine if their Temporary Restaurant is adequate
- Contact Local History Associations
 - Offer Civil War Presentations if interested

- Researcher needed for this effort
- **Membership Recruitment**
If there is NO winter increase in Covid Cases
 - Set up Meet-up.com Site again in Jan '23
 - Advertise the Roundtable to public
 - Post Pictures of the Roundtable and list topics

Election of Officers 2023

Deferred to Future Meeting

Vice President

No Report

Treasurer

- Wells Fargo account balance as of October 2022: Approx \$1,827
- Increase due in part by sale of statues on eBay
- Need to continually remind members pay dues
- Dues for 2023:
 - Increased as follows: Individual: \$25; Family: \$40
 - Dues period changed to January thru December

Secretary

- Civil War Quiz: What Do You Know About Events Leading to the Civil War?
- Meeting Attendance: Total: 11 (9 in-person; 2 via ZOOM)

Historian

No Report

Civil War Almanac This Day in the Civil War History: Oct 25

1861: At Greenpoint New York, the hull is laid for the USS Monitor, the “cheesebox on a raft” fated to make the existing navy fleets of the world obsolete. In a letter to Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox, Flag Officer Dupont advocates amphibious operations in coastal warfare. Meanwhile in Richmond, VA Jefferson Davis deals with Genl Beauregard, who protests not receiving the commands he feels entitled to have.

1862: Lincoln, frustrated at McClellan’s delays after Antietam, wires McClellan: “I have just read your dispatch about fatigued horses. Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam, that have fatigued anything?” Meanwhile, Major General Grant accepts command of the 13th Army Corps and the Department of the

Tennessee. There is skirmishing near Zuni, Virginia, Lawrenceburg Kentucky, Donaldson Louisiana, and Eleven Points Missouri.

1863: Confederate John Marmaduke attacks Pine Bluff Arkansas, after his demand for the town's surrender is refused. Then, after a brief occupation, he withdraws. There is skirmishing near Bealeton Virginia.

1864: Near Mine Creek Kansas, Federals catch up with Sterling Price's fleeing columns. Pleasanton inflicts heavy damage on the rebel wagon train with his cavalry force. The Confederates are forced to burn one-third of the remaining wagons in order to continue fleeing south. Meanwhile, fighting breaks around the Alabama-Tennessee border, between Federals and John Bell Hood's Confederates. There is skirmishing near Memphis Tennessee, Milford Virginia, and Halfway House Arkansas

Organization of the Month: Grant's Memoirs: The Grand Army of The Republic: Fraternity, Charity, Loyalty

Background/Beginnings

- The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the largest of all Civil War veterans' organizations, was a fraternal order, powerful political lobby, passionate advocate of national patriotism...and more.
- The first GAR post was formed in Decatur IL in 1866 by Dr Benjamin Franklin Stephenson, a former Union army surgeon, and Gen John Logan, also a Union army veteran.
- The GAR principles were Fraternity, Charity, Loyalty. The GAR mission was comradeship and benevolence to all Union Civil War veterans honorably discharged. Posts at the local level were organized into departments at the state level; at the top was national headquarters. Any man could join by furnishing proof of Civil War military service and honorable discharge, and pay a muster-in fee to the local post. Membership was open regardless of race, religion, previous rank, or the nature of duties performed during the war.
- Members had to purchase distinctive GAR uniforms, dark blue with bronze buttons, and the GAR bronze star badge suspended from a ribbon, to be worn at GAR meetings and other special events. Muster-in fees and post dues varied considerably from one post to the next.
- The GAR had as its women's auxiliary the Women's Relief Corps (WRC) who assisted in fundraising by holding fairs and going door to door to solicit charitable donations.
- GAR established old soldiers' homes in 16 states and veterans' orphanages in 7 states; eventually transferred to the Federal government.

Fraternal Order

- If a man belonged to a fraternal order that had lodges across the country, this man could move to a new town and quickly anchor himself socially by joining his order's lodge in his new surroundings.
- Most of the dues money was held in a fund for this purpose. And in a time when mortality rates at all ages were so high and death from accident or disease could strike swiftly, the lodge would be sure to provide a decent burial, and protect a member's survivors from hardship.

Temporary Decline & Recovery

- In 1868, post members hardly needed prodding by headquarters, to make a united effort get out the vote to elect Grant President. (Not that Grant really needed extra help to get elected, he was so popular by then.)
- By the mid-1870's, membership in the GAR declined dramatically, to only 56 thousand members nationwide. How come?
- GAR members disliked this ranking and strict discipline. Posts needed to elect officers to provide administrative leadership like all fraternal lodges; aside from that, GAR members of all wartime ranks, wanted to set aside rank distinctions, and simply enjoy camaraderie with other veterans. They enjoyed calling one another "comrade."
- The GAR recovered membership once headquarters abolished ranks and softened discipline, reserving "dishonorable discharge" for serious offenses that could disgrace the post, such as public drunkenness, thievery, or violent behavior. And, making it harder for posts to get away with flouting the GAR eligibility rules.
- The biggest celebrations of camaraderie were GAR national encampments, major conventions held annually in big cities, the last one was held in 1949.

Post Membership Varied

- GAR membership nationwide over the years, made up about half the total number of Civil War veterans. GAR membership could and did vary considerably from one post to the next, from 2 dozen or so in small towns to over 1 thousand in big cities.
- Posts comprised of well-to-do veterans kept out the less well off by requiring high muster-in fees and dues payments. However, it was understood that GAR member owed respect to every other member, and every other veteran as well, "We all drank from the same canteen." Posts with money to spare would aid less affluent posts struggling to help unfortunate veterans.

GAR & Republican Party

- It's true many GAR post members were Republicans. Since GAR meetings were closed to outsiders, this led to the GAR being suspected of being an agent of the Republican party.

- To silence criticism, the GAR required members to pledge, never to discuss politics at post meetings or campfires. (Incidentally, the GAR wasn't the only fraternal order to be accused this way.
- The Masons, whose meetings were also closed to outsiders, were sometimes suspected of being the agents of all sorts of evil interests.)

Pensions & Benefits

- The Panic of 1873 only lasted a few years, but it was the worst depression to strike America until the 1930's. Late 19th century America was coming to realize that millions of Americans could be devastated by circumstances truly beyond the individual's control.
- There was a growing public consensus that the nation owed its Civil War veterans a debt of gratitude: It had been the armies in the field and the naval blockade ships that had ultimately won the war that had kept America from breaking apart.
- GAR leadership now called upon departments and their posts to create a national political lobby whose single issue was government expansion of veterans' and dependents' pensions and benefits. In return for service to their country that could mean risking suffering and death, veterans had the right to economic security in disability and old age, apart from what a local GAR post could provide, or not.

Pensions & Benefits Expansion

- Starting in the 1880's, the GAR pushed state legislatures for statutes ensuring state provided veteran pensions and benefits, for example state funded burial of destitute veterans, establishment of old soldiers' homes, and veteran preference in government hiring.
- Legislatures passed laws with virtually no debate; the public was sympathetic to Civil War veterans, and disciplined directed effort meant the GAR flexed strong political muscles.
- The Federal Arrears Act of 1879 did not expand on the wartime service-related disability basis for claims or increase pension rates. What it did do was establish all payments starting from the date of the serviceman's discharge. What's more, payments starting from the discharge date were made retroactive, meaning those who had delayed in applying and then had to wait for approval, now collected years of back pension pay.
- GAR membership tripled between 1880 and 1884. The GAR proclaimed: The Union veteran had a prior claim on the nation's treasury. Not as charity, but as a reward owed to men who had served to save the nation, often at enormous cost to themselves.
- The 1881 national encampment appointed a committee to serve as the GAR lobby in Washington, its single objective, continued expansion of veterans' and their dependents' pensions and benefits.

- The Dependent and Disability Pension Act of 1890, approved by President Benjamin Harrison, was next step in pension expansion.
- A pension was granted to every honorably discharged serviceman of 90 days' service or more, who suffered any disability that incapacitated him, no matter how or when the disability had been incurred.

American Nationhood & GAR Legacy

- Ever since the end of the Civil War, the GAR had championed the interests of Union veterans, who had won the war that had saved the Union and kept America intact. Now, GAR posts worked energetically at the local level nationwide, well into the 20th century, to inspire younger generations with abiding loyalty to their country, and remembrance of what veterans had done for America.
- In 1868, GAR commander-in-chief John Logan established Memorial Day at the urging of his wife. She had been inspired by the ceremonies of decorating Confederate soldiers' graves by Southern women.
- The GAR would go on to establish Memorial Day as a major national holiday, to embrace remembrance of all American military dead.
- One last GAR contribution: Much Civil War history might have been lost for good, had it not been for each GAR post being required to keep archives of their members' wartime diaries, letters, and memoirs. GAR posts then donated these archives to museums and national repositories including the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian.
- The accomplishments of the GAR in its 90 years of existence ensured that the aftermath of the Civil War would continue to shape American nationhood in ways so deeply rooted now, it's hard for us to imagine how very different life was, before the guns fired on Fort Sumter.

Other Topics

No Report

October Presentation

Speaker: Abby Eller

Topic: "The Grand Army of the Republic"

November Presentation

Speaker: Martha Conway

Topic: On her published novel, "The Physician's Daughter"

December

No Meeting