



SOUTH BAY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

South Bay Civil War Roundtable Meeting Minutes April 29, 2025

Meeting Location: Jack's Restaurant & Bar 1502 Saratoga Ave, San Jose, CA 95129 located in the Westgate Center Shopping Mall and via ZOOM

Special Activities & Events:

2nd Annual Central Coast Conference

- Event Theme: Seldom Heard History of the Civil War
- Location: Stanton Center, Monterey, California
- Date: May 2-4, 2025
- Event URL: <https://whtours.org/seldom-heard-history-2025.html>

Officer Reports

President

SBCWRT Picnic

- Tonya McQuade to host at family home
- Event Date Change: Because of high volume commuter traffic concerns, date was changed to Saturday September 6 1:00pm
- Food/Refreshments:
 - Main Course: BBQ Chicken and Hamburgers provided by Picnic Hosts (cost paid from SBCWRT funds)
 - Other food/refreshment items provided by other members (salads, desserts, drinks, etc.)
- Attendees:
 - Members plus one guest
 - Non-members who are on the SBCWRT email list are encouraged to attend with the hope that they will considering becoming Dues Paying members

Vice President

No Report

Treasurer

- Wells Fargo Checking Account Balance as of 3-31-25: \$2,514.85
an increase of \$18.37 from previous month

Secretary

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

This Month in Civil War History: March

1861: President Lincoln issues a public declaration that an insurrection exists and calls for 75,000 militia to stop the rebellion. As a result of this call for volunteers, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee secede from the Union in the following weeks. Lincoln will respond on May 3 with an additional call for 43,000+ volunteers to serve for three years, expanding the size of the Regular Army

1862: A Federal fleet of gunships under Admiral David Farragut passes Confederate forts guarding the mouth of the Mississippi River. On April 25, the fleet arrived at New Orleans where they demanded the surrender of the city. Within two days the forts fall to Federal forces and the mouth of the great river is under United States control.

1863: In North Carolina, the Adjutant General's Office issues an order drafting slaves, able-bodied males between 18 and 45, from counties in the central part of the state. These men will be sent to Wilmington to build military fortifications

1864: Grant forbids prisoner exchange talks to progress unless Confederate authorities agree to treat black soldiers the same as white and until Confederates release enough US soldiers to make up for the large number of Confederates paroled at Vicksburg and Port Hudson

1865: President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated by actor John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theater in Washington, DC. On the same day, Fort Sumter, South Carolina is re-occupied by US troops

Person of the Month: Willie Johnston Drummer Boy

Drummer Boys in the Army

- 40,000 drummer boys served in Union or Confederate armies
- A critical position in the Civil War
 - Responsible for relaying officers' commands/messages to soldiers
 - "Three Beats" signaled reveille, while "Tattoo" indicated bedtime
 - Other drum sequences told troops that they should "Commence Firing," "Advance" or "Retreat."
- Normally did not carry arms, but never far from danger
- Drummers usually positioned behind front lines, enemy understood that wounding/killing drummers would scramble lines of communication
- Played for parades and ceremonial occasions
- During fighting, often helped the medical personnel
- Ranged in age from 8 to young adulthood
- Estimated 20% of Union and Confederate soldiers were younger than 18

Willie Johnston – Start of Civil War

- Born in Morristown, New York, in July 1850
- Father, William H.B. Johnston -- an Englishman who felt compelled to defend his adopted country – enlists in 1861
- Willie joined him in D Company of the 3rd Vermont Volunteer Infantry Regiment in December 1861
- He was 5 feet tall and 11 years old

Seven Days Battles – Malvern Hill

- His unit participated in Seven Days Battles/started arduous retreat from Malvern Hill on July 1, 1862
- Most soldiers and drummers disposed of their weapons and backpacks to lighten their load - except for Willie
- Performed during Fourth of July parade; Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, Commander Army of the Potomac, organized to improve morale

Medal of Honor

- His story of dedication reaches President Lincoln
- Sept. 16, 1863; 2 mos after 13th birthday, received the Medal of Honor
- Is the young person to have received the award

Later Civil War

- Johnston was wounded/transferred to Invalid Corps/later the Veteran Reserve Corp
- While assigned to the VRC, Johnston played in hospital's band/was appointed as a drum major
- Re-enlisted in 3rd Vermont at Brandy Station, VA, on February 15, 1864

- Was mustered out of the service on August 31, 1865

After the Civil War

- Moved to Charlestown, Mass; in 1860s, worked as a machinist
- Had 5 children; Details of his later life are incomplete
- July 1899, Johnston listed among attendees at a Medal of Honor Legion reunion in Burlington, Vermont
- In 1917, applied for Civil War Campaign Medal; little more is known

Historian

Common Man Experiences

- Tom McMahon's life work has been focused on assisting people to live healthier lives
- Focused on assisting individuals to become good solid persons who then assist others to achieve similar objectives
- Had a relative who during the Civil War served in the Union Navy

Other Topics

None

April Presentation

Speaker: Alan Sissenwein

Topic: "William B. Franklin, One of the Union's Worst Generals"

May Presentation

Speaker: Kirstein Ta

Topic: "Reminiscences of Smithville in Dekalb County, Tennessee –A personal account of the Civil War through a child's eyes"

June Presentation

Speaker: Ron Vaughan

Topic: "The Battle Of Big Bethel, 1st battle of the Civil War"