



THE drum roll

Volume 36

345th Regular Meeting
Number 4

December 1, 2017

Proud, patriotic, hard-fighting Irishman

Friday, December 1, 2017, 7:30 p.m.

Arlington Heights Memorial Library
500 North Dunton Avenue, Arlington Heights, Illinois

Meagher of the Sword



Pat McCormick

Among immigrant groups that served the Union cause during the Civil War, the Irish were second in number only to the Germans. Far and away the most famous Irish unit was the Irish Brigade of the Second Corps, Army of the Potomac. The brigade's founder and primary commander, Thomas Francis Meagher, was already famous in the United States prior to the Civil War (and even more famous — or infamous, depending on point of view — in his native Ireland).

Born in Waterford to a relatively well-to-do (especially among the oppressed Catholics) fam-

ily, Meagher was educated in England. After returning home, he became enmeshed in politics, particularly in the Young Ireland movement that championed independence from the British Empire. As his eloquent speeches became more prominent and more anti-British, he was first imprisoned and then exiled to Tasmania.

From there he eventually escaped and sailed to America, where he settled in New York City and became a prominent legal and political presence. After seeing combat at First Manassas Meagher formed the Irish Brigade, which he led from the Peninsula through Chancellorsville. After leaving the Brigade he remained in the Army, and then in U.S. government service, for the remainder of his short life. On Friday, December 1, 2017, Patrick McCormick will present the life of this proud, patriotic, hard-fighting Irishman.

Neither his aerospace engineering degree from Georgia Tech nor his profession have anything to do with the Civil War, but Patrick McCormick has been fascinated — some might say obsessed — by the conflict since 1973.

McCormick is a past president of the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table and current historian of the group. A voracious reader (when he has time), battlefield walker, and war gamer, McCormick is a regular participant in the Saturday discussions and the Eisenhower Library group. (He is also more than a little Irish in descent.)

If you would like to join us for dinner with Pat McCormick at Sam's of Arlington restaurant, 1863 West Central Road, Arlington Heights, at 5:30 p.m. before the meeting on December 1, please contact me at kberlant@comcast.net or (847) 506-1807 by Wednesday, November 29. —

Wayne Rhine

Dues checks should be sent to Pat McCormick as soon as possible

The Grand Army of the Republic in Chicago

By Pat McCormick

After the Civil War, the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) was the large “and politically powerful” association of Union veterans. On November 3, 2017, Robert Girardi led us through the rise and decline of the GAR.

Following the great review parades in Washington in May 1865, the huge Union volunteer army was gradually decommissioned. Veterans often found the transition to civilian life difficult, as their experience could be hard for those on the home front to understand.

Jobs could be scarce, many vets were handicapped or crippled, and there were widows and orphans to take care of. Partly in response to these issues, the fraternal organization known as the Grand Army of the Republic was founded in Decatur, Illinois, on April 6, 1866. Later that year a chapter opened in Springfield; more followed, beginning in Illinois and then spreading nationally. The initial Chicago chapter was the George H. Thomas chapter, which was disbanded after the Chicago Fire of 1871 but then re-established and would continue to be the largest Chicago chapter for most of its existence.

The GAR motto was “Fraternity, Charity, Loyalty.” It was far and away the largest of the post-war veterans’ associations, with a peak membership of some 409,000 by the 1890s. Part of the society’s mission was taking care of needy veterans and their families (including the aforesaid widows and orphans). Fellowship was a main objective, as was memorialization. The GAR was instrumental in yearly memorial services, when monuments were dedicated, graves were decorated, and parades were held. In 1868 John A. Logan, by now a powerful Republican congressman (and soon to be senator), was elected the na-

tional leader of the GAR. He became instrumental in officially establishing Decoration Day as a national holiday — now known as Memorial Day. The date for Decoration Day was initially established as May 30, because that would not conflict with other national celebrations.

The rising membership of the GAR, and the prominence of Logan, enhanced its political power. Although not affiliated with any party, the GAR tended to be a significant Republican Party

voting bloc (being that the Republicans were foremost in prosecuting the war). One of their main concerns on the political front was veteran pensions; at one point a full 25 percent of the U.S. government budget covered Union soldier pensions.

Illinois in general, and Chicago in particular, enjoyed a highly visible GAR presence. At its peak, Chicago alone held 34 posts, including several exclu-

sively African-American ones. (These were segregated by choice; the GAR welcomed all veterans, regardless of race, and some posts were mixed-race.) The statues of U. S. Grant, Abraham Lincoln, and John Logan in Lincoln and Grant Parks were erected by the organization. GAR monuments survive in 65 Chicago cemeteries; for example, the George Thomas chapter has a memorial in Rosehill Cemetery. And Chicago was a popular choice for GAR encampments. The Chicago GAR even erected a monument to Confederate veterans (despite some opposition within the national organization) and CSA vets were sometimes invited to ceremonies.

The most visible GAR presence in Chicago was the Memorial Hall, located at the corner of Randolph and Michigan. The land was initially offered simultaneously to both the GAR and the



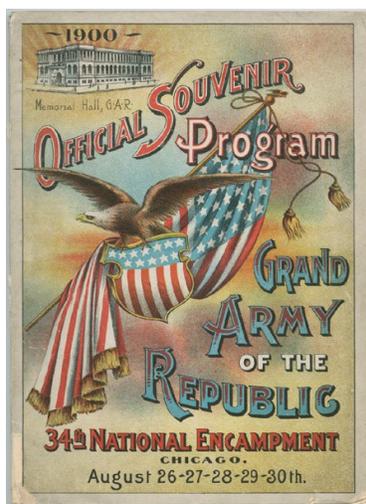
The dome in the GAR Hall at the Chicago Cultural Center.

Chicago Public Library, with the end result being that the veterans had a 50-year lease on a large space in the library-owned building. The hall itself was ornate and spacious, with names of Illinois generals emblazoned on the walls. Its collection included books, documents, paintings, and artifacts. The cornerstone of the still-extant building reads

1893

Grand Army of the Republic and the organization took official possession in December 1898.

As the century turned and the aging veterans began to pass on, the GAR's power and visibility waned. Veterans' presence in parades declined, to the extent that by the early 20th Century there were attempts to combine non-memorial elements (such as the Workhorse Parade of 1911) with GAR events. Other amusements began to encroach on



1900 National Encampment program cover

memorial activities. The 50-year lease of the GAR was not renewed, and the hall and the collections were taken over by the library for good. The building is now the Chicago Cultural Center. Except for unexplained missing items, all of the collection is available at the special collections department of the Harold Washington Library. Artifacts can be seen, but an appointment is recommended or may be required.

By 1937 only 40 veterans remained in Chicago; the last of them died in 1955. Today the GAR is all but forgotten, except by historically minded organizations such as round tables.

On behalf of the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table I would like to thank Robert Girardi for telling us the story of the Grand Army of the Republic from, as he put it, "reverence to irrelevance."

December Saturday Discussion

All members and guests are invited to participate in the session to be held at the Barrington Area Library on Saturday, December 16, 2016, from 10:00 a.m. until noon. The topic of the day will be the annual game of Civil War Trivia. Members are invited to bring their favorite holiday treats to share with the group and their own beverage.

These discussions are generally held on the third Saturday of the month from September through June. They are held to generate and foster a free exchange of ideas on Civil War events.

Get Involved

All members are encouraged to participate in all activities of the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table. There are a number of significant ways for members to serve the organization, for example, as an officer, trustee, committee member, or speaker. Anyone who would like to get more involved in these activities may contact President Wayne Rhine or any other current officer or past president.

drum roll, December 2017

December Events

December 2, Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. James S. Pula will speak on the 26th Wisconsin at Chancellorsville, noon. Information on all Civil War Museum programs is available at (262) 653-4140 or www.thecivilwarmuseum.org.

December 3, McHenry County Civil War Round Table. The group will have "Lunch with Clara Barton" at the Grand Old Mill, 7514 Barnard Mill Road, Wonder Lake, 11 a.m.

December 8, Second Friday Lecture Series, Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Steven Rogstad will speak on Carl Sandburg's Lincoln: History or Historical Novel?, noon. Free program is sponsored by the Milwaukee Civil War Roundtable and the Iron Brigade Association.

December 8, Chicago Civil War Round Table. David Dixon will speak on the Lost Gettysburg Address.

December 14, Lake County Civil War Round Table will hold its annual pot-luck dinner.

December 15, Salt Creek Civil War Round Table. Roger Bohn will speak on Naval Operations During the Civil War.



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November Raffle

The lucky winners of the November raffle were Bruce Allardice, who won *The General's Wife: The Life of Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant* by Ishbel Ross; Ken Tokarz, who won *Sherman's March* by Richard Wheeler; Mellanie Fowler, who won *The Custer Adventure*, compiled by Richard Upton; David Noe, who won *The Boy General: The Life and Careers of Francis Channing Barlow* by Richard F. Welch; Dan Cicero, who won *General George E. Pickett in Life and Legend* by Lesley J. Gordon and *The Lincoln Reader* edited by Paul M. Angle; and Charles Banks, who won *38 Nooses: Lincoln, Little Crow, and the Beginning of the Frontier's End* by Scott W. Berg.

Congratulations to the winners and sincere thanks to the donors.

Eisenhower Library Discussion

The Civil War discussion group at the Eisenhower Library, 4613 North Oketo Avenue, Harwood Heights, meets on the first Saturday of the month from 10:00 until 11:30 a.m. On December 2 the group will discuss the third day of the Chickamauga campaign.

To Contribute to the Drum Roll

All members are welcome to contribute items to the newsletter. Articles should be as long as necessary to cover the subject. If you have information to share, please send it to Sally Smith, 328 Eastern Avenue, Barrington, Illinois 60010-4629 or e-mail drum_roll4@juno.com.

2017-2018 Speakers

December 1	Pat McCormick	Irish Brigade
January 5	Wayne Rhine	Cushing Brothers



To learn more about the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table
 visit our website at www.northernilcwr.org