



THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

THE drum roll

412th Regular Meeting Volume 42 Number 3 December 6, 2024



PLEASE NOTE!!!!

The December meeting will be in person at the Arlington Hts. Library, Dec.6, 2024, and on ZOOM, at 7:00 P.M. The Library is located at the corner of W. Euclid Ave. and Dunton St. in Arlington Hts.

Our speaker for December is Dave Oberg. Dave serves as the Executive Director of the Elmhurst History Museum and has worked in the museum industry for 35 years. He is a past President of the Illinois Association of Museums and the author of two books, *Robert Tinker's Rockford*, and *Past Meets Present*, as well as numerous articles for the museum industry. He is the great-great grandson of Pehr Alfrid Oberg, who served with Battery H, First Illinois Light Artillery from 1862-1865.

Sons of Thunder: A Brief History of Battery H, First Illinois Light Artillery—Learn the fascinating history of Battery H, First Illinois Light Artillery, also known as the Swede Battery, Silfversparre's Battery and DeGress' Battery, from its baptism by

fire at Shiloh through its last engagement at Bentonville. Dave Oberg, great-great grandson of Battery H veteran Pehr Alfrid Oberg, will include personal family stories and insight from officers and enlisted men, including riveting first-hand accounts of this storied Battery's experiences, including its brief capture during the Atlanta campaign.

LINCOLN'S WATCH

It is no surprise that President Abraham Lincoln had a high-quality pocket watch; two of them, in fact. But there is much more to it than meets the eye, as Douglas Stiles related to the Round Table on November 1.

The story began with Stiles' great uncle in Minnesota, circa 1972. This uncle passed along a

family story concerning Stiles' great-great grandfather, a watchmaker named Jonathon Dillon. This native of Ireland was living in Washington DC in April 1861 – working at M.W. Galt and Company. According to family legend, it so happened that Lincoln's watch was in the shop for repairs when Galt gave the news to Dillon: "War has begun – the first shot has been fired!" Before finishing the repairs, Dillon was inspired to inscribe the date, the start of the war, and his gratitude for a strong government inside. To Stiles, this seemed dubious at best – that was an awful lot to inscribe in such a small space. Real life, including raising a family, shoved the legend to the dim background of Stiles' life. But in 2008, his cousin – the son of great-uncle Dave – sent him an old letter, on Dillon Watch Company stationery, containing information about the watch. Could the story be true? Coincidentally, the new Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library had recently opened. Perhaps they had the watch itself? Stiles went down to Springfield for a couple of days in 2009, first doing some online research - unearthing a 1906 New York Times article investigating who was then in possession of the watch. The "etching" story in the article came from an 84-year-old serving as a juror at that time. Stiles also located a 1910 letter from Robert Todd Lincoln in which Robert recalled there only being two watches of his father's. Springfield produced no watch, but in the library archives there was a folder with a number of related documents: claims, lawsuits, and other items of that ilk. Back home and digging further, Stiles uncovered a 1958 article noting that an original Lincoln watch was presently owned by the Smithsonian. And in 2002, the Kentucky Historical Society acquired a Lincoln watch from a donor, with a chain of custody going back to Robert Lincoln. But which of these watches was the one Dillon had allegedly etched? Lincoln's two watches each had different fobs at the ends of their chains: One a bar, one a hook. Stiles cycled through a number of Lincoln photos, tracking (by the dates the photos were taken) what time periods the President wore the "bar" or "hook" watches, respectively. (Prior to the Presidency, Lincoln had no chain whatsoever – apparently it wasn't in line with his rough-hewn campaign image to have such an accessory.) The "bar" watch does not show up in photos prior to 1864; part of the provenance of the "bar" watch in possession of the Kentucky Historical Society was the purchase receipt of that

watch, bought (along with one for Tad Lincoln) in 1864. Thus the Dillon watch could only have been the "hook" watch, now at the Smithsonian. On February 12, 2009 – Lincoln's 200th birthday, no less – Dillon called the Smithsonian with his story. The curator – who stated that the watch was his favorite artifact – mentioned that the watch had been opened a number of times, and there was no etching of any kind inside the case. Stiles E-mailed a copy of the 1906 Times article and, he related, within a couple of hours, the Smithsonian staff was in an "uproar." Yes, the watch case had been opened to look at the clock face itself – but no one had ever taken the watch apart to view the interior mechanism!

The Smithsonian decided to do so, enlisting watch expert George Thomas -a "national treasure," as Stiles described him – for the task. The museum made it an event, on March 10, 2009, and invited Stiles to the opening. As Thomas removed the pins and readied the watch to open, he announced that now was the "moment of truth." And – there was an inscription! Appropriately, Stiles was selected to be the first to read it. The inscription read: "Jonathan Dillon / April 13, 1861 / Fort Sumpter was attacked by the Rebels on the above/date J. Dillon." He also inscribed: "" April 13 1861 / Washington / Thank God we have a government." Almost certainly, Abraham Lincoln never knew of the inscription, and a later watchmaker made this a GOOD thing. The watch went back for routine maintenance in September 1864. This time the technician was one L.E. Gross, who was apparently a Southern sympathizer; he had a brother in the Confederate army. Before re-closing the watch, Gross etched his own name, and "Sept 1864 Wash DC" – then, onto a separate mechanical arm, inscribed "Jeff Davis." Thus, for the remainder of his life, Lincoln owned a watch with the opposing President's name etched inside! Stiles mentioned that it is likely that Lincoln was wearing this watch when he was shot, since he had switched back to it for the February 1865 portrait. It was reported that, in Lincoln's last moment, the only sound was Lincoln's watch ticking – likely this watch. Stiles also noted that, for the movie Lincoln, Steven Spielberg was allowed to borrow the other watch – the "bar" watch from Kentucky - where it can be heard ticking in the death scene.

On behalf of the Round Table, I would like to thank Douglas Stiles for a fascinating presentation.

Pat McCormic



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Appointed Positions

Newsletter Editor	Jerry Rodosky
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Upcoming Events

Join Zoom Meeting on Friday, Dec 6, 2024, at 7 PM.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81433758155?pwd=S1FqVjJ1WmZsTTd1VlJNRCTLcjJLdz09>

This link works for the discussion group also.

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The discussion group will meet Wed.night, Dec. 11, 2024. From 7 to 8:30 PM. The subject will be ARKANSAS 1863. Please join us on ZOOM.

SATURDAY/TUESDAY Discussion

The link for the reg meeting works for this.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81433758155?pwd=S1FqVjJ1WmZsTTd1VlJNRCTLcjJLdz09>

Speakers

Sept. 6, 2024, Leslie Goddard: Clara Barton, Civil War Nurse

Oct. 4, 2024, Charlie Banks: General Herman Haupt

Nov. 1, 2024, Doug Stiles: Lincoln's Watch

Dec. 6, 2024, Dave Oberg: The First Illinois Light Artillery

Jan. 3, 2025, Gordon Ramsey: Music of the Civil War

Feb. 7, 2025, Father Bob Miller: Civilian Life in Vicksburg

Mar. 7, 2025, Jan Rasmussen: The Dakota War

Apr. 4, 2025, Brian Conroy: TBA

May 2, 2025, Dave Powell: TBA

June 7, 2025, Bob Presman: Could the South Have Won the Civil War?

Steve Alban of McHenry is organizing a tour of the Kenosha Civil War Museum for Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024. Anyone interested should contact Steve at stevealban@yahoo.com or Ed Urban at eurban@protonmail.com. Doug Dammann who has spoken to many Round Tables will lead the tour. We hope to get some behind the scenes

viewing. We hope you can join us and maybe get a couple of others to join us.

Questions? Comments? Email me or call.

Jerry Rodosky

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I will forward your questions or comments to the appropriate person.

Remember: The Board has decided not to charge dues for the upcoming 2024-2025 year. Let's use this to invite new members. What a way to try us out!