



THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

# THE drum roll

408th Regular Meeting Volume 41 Number 10 June 7, 2024



## PLEASE NOTE!!!!

The June meeting will be in person at the Arlington Hts. Library, June 7, 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.

Please check the announcements on Page 4.

Our speaker for the June meeting is Diana Dretske.

## The 96th Illinois Infantry

The presentation will explore how uncovering the identities of immigrant soldiers in a group portrait led to re-examining the role of immigrants in the Union Army and the first extensive look at the service of the 96th Illinois since the regiment's history was published in 1887. The Battle of Chickamauga and the consequences for these men will be highlighted.



**Diana Dretske** is the senior curator and Lake County historian for the Lake County Forest Preserves Bess Bower Dunn Museum. She has published three books, and her most recent, *The Bonds of War* with SIU Press, was named a finalist in the Army Historical Foundation Distinguished Writing Awards (2021). She is the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Illinois State Historical Society for outstanding contributions in promoting, preserving, and commemorating Illinois history.

## WHEN DRAFTEES DID THEIR DUTY

The Civil War military draft was a mixed (at best) success, replete with shirkers, deserters and the physically unfit. On May 3, John Sebastian explored this system, stemming from the record of an individual who served honorably.

The meeting was held at the Arlington Heights Historical Society, and Sebastian's story began in an adjacent building on the same grounds: the Muller House. Among the wall hangings in the house is a framed Grand Army of the Republic certificate of one Charles Bollenbach of the 51st Illinois Volunteers –a draftee.

At the outset of the Civil War, the United States Army was small – approximately 16,000 men – and scattered. After Fort Sumter was attacked, President Lincoln called for 75,000 three-month volunteers. This would prove inadequate, and more men would soon join. The 1861 enlistees were generally volunteers of the most patriotic nature. The war progressed slowly in that first year, and despite the shocking casualty levels of First Manassas, that battle and Wilson's Creek were the only major land battles in 1861. The hard hand of war had not been too hard as of yet.

In 1862, this changed dramatically. Early in the spring, with widespread Union success, the war seemed to be going so well that Secretary of War Edwin Stanton closed the recruiting offices. This proved to be premature. The costly victory at Shiloh in April, and even higher-cost reverses on the Virginia Peninsula, led the administration to re-open the recruiting stations in early June. A month later, Lincoln put out a call for another 300,000 volunteers.

With the war now proving to be much bloodier than initially anticipated, and seemingly with no end in sight, there were concerns that volunteerism might not be adequate. In July, Congress passed the Militia Act, requiring all able-bodied men of military age to enroll in their local militia – which the President was empowered to call out for up to nine months. (In a practical sense, this gave the government drafting powers.) It was hoped that the prospect of a draft would instead spur voluntary enlistment; as Sebastian pointed out, there was a stigma associated with being a draftee instead of a volunteer. Each state was

assigned a quota of enlistment; if the quota was not met, then the 9-month militia would be called up. (Illinois, assigned a quota of 26,148, easily exceeded it: 98,416 men divided among 59 new infantry regiments and 4 artillery units.)

Meanwhile, the war ground on. Fall of 1862 saw widespread Confederate offensives turned back, at heavy cost (including Antietam, the bloodiest single day of the war) and early winter saw the carnage of Fredericksburg and Stones River. This prompted a new Enrollment Act in March of 1863, which was essentially a straight-up draft. This act did provide a couple of loopholes, for those who could afford them. A draftee could pay \$300.00 to commute his selection for the current draft call (this would not protect him from a future call, however.) Alternately, he could hire a substitute to take his place in the draft; doing so would exempt the hirer from future drafts.

There was significant resistance to this new draft, especially taking the form of men who refused to report. Other draftees would desert at the first opportunity, or find way to shirk duty as much as possible; often, hired substitutes were of poor military quality. Critics of the draft complained that it was government overreach (Sebastian mentioned that other war measures – income tax, war bonds, the Emancipation Proclamation – were similarly criticized as overreach.) Once again, Illinois met its quota, and then some. In fact, over the course of the war, of Illinois' 256,000 recruits, only 1.4% were draftees - the lowest percentage of any state.

One of those Illinois draftees was Charles Bollenbach. Born in Alsace, Bollenbach emigrated to the United States, settling first in the small Illinois village of Dunton (which eventually would become Arlington Heights) and then in Long Grove. Charles actually was enlisted as a substitute for his drafted brother, thus still a product of the draft system. (Although not yet citizens themselves, immigrants who planned to become citizens were also draft-eligible.) He was initially sent to Camp Douglas in Chicago, then on to Chattanooga, Tennessee to join the veteran 51st Illinois Infantry, part of Luther Bradley's brigade, George Wagner's division, 4th Corps, Army of the Cumberland.

He joined the 51st after the Atlanta campaign had been completed. When the Confederates under John Bell Hood made their desperation move north into Tennessee, the 4th Corps was among the troops sent back to George Thomas in Nashville to counter this incursion. On November 29, 1864, Bollenbach and the 51st saw action at Spring Hill, Tennessee, where Hood's attempt to cut the 4th and 23rd Corps off from Nashville failed. The following day, as the Federals got ready to defend against Rebel attack at Franklin, Wagner left two of his brigades exposed forward of the main line, including the 51st Illinois. (Bollenbach was in earshot of a heated argument between Wagner and brigade commander Emerson Opdycke, who refused to leave his brigade exposed with the other two). The two exposed brigades were overrun by the fierce Rebel charge, but Bollenbach survived the fight and participated in the subsequent Union victory at Nashville, and the pursuit that followed. He survived the war, returning to Long Grove and becoming a prominent blacksmith.

On behalf of the Round Table, I would like to thank John Sebastian for his examination of the draft and of Charles Bollenbach, a draftee who served with honor.

Pat McCormick



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## Appointed Positions

Newsletter Editor	Jerry Rodosky
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## Upcoming Events

Join Zoom Meeting on Friday, June 7, 2024, at 7 PM.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81433758155?pwd=S1FqVjJ1WmZsTTd1VIJNRCtLcjJLdz09>

## Important Announcements!!!!!!

At the June meeting, we will hold elections for the 2024-2025 year. This is an urgent plea for anyone who wants to help to step up and volunteer for one of the officer positions. You will get lots of help, and it will go a long way to keep the NICWRT a viable and energetic group.

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Our Saturday discussion group will meet on Saturday, June 15, 2024, at 10 AM via ZOOM. Pat McCormick will lead a discussion about Gen. Patrick Cleburne. This should be an interesting and maybe controversial way to end our Saturday discussions for the summer. Please join us as we decide whether to continue these Saturday sessions. The session will end at 11:30 AM. Pat certainly deserves a pat on the back for his efforts on these sessions!

The link above works for this meeting, also. Don't miss it.

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Questions? Comments? Email me or call.

Jerry Rodosky

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