



# THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

## THE drum roll

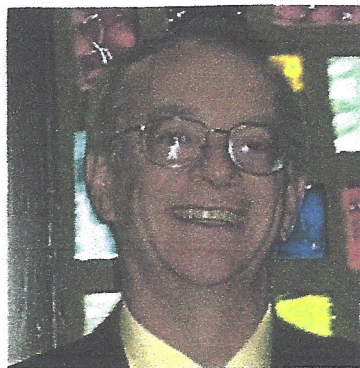
368<sup>TH</sup> REGULAR MEETING  
VOLUME 38 NUMBER 7 MARCH 6, 2020

### *Three strikes for the Hunley*

Friday, March 6, 2020 7:30 P.M.

Arlington Heights Historical Museum  
110 W. Fremont Street  
Arlington Heights, IL

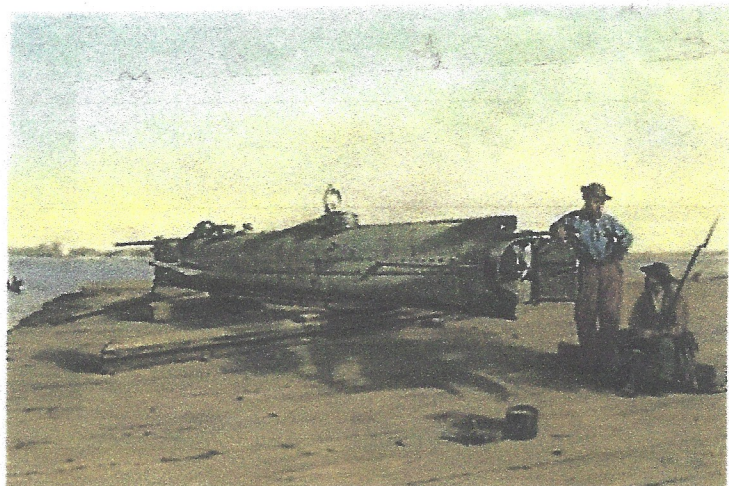
### **"MYSTERIES OF THE CSS HUNLEY"**



Bruce Allardice is a history professor at South Suburban College. He is a past president of the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table and the Civil War Round Table of Chicago. He has authored or co-authored six books and numerous articles. Bruce is a former board member of the Illinois State Historical Society and a recipient of the CWRT of Chicago's prestigious Nevins-Freeman Award for distinguished service in Civil War scholarship and the Civil War Round Table movement. He also heads the "Civil War Baseball" subcommittee for the Society of American Baseball Research (SABR) and is a member of SABR's Biography Committee specializing in researching the lives of 19<sup>th</sup> century ballplayers.

If you would like to join us for dinner with Bruce at 5:30 P.m. before the meeting on March 6 at Sam's of Arlington Restaurant, 1863 Central Road, Arlington Heights, please contact Denise Limburg at 847/212-5313 or [dlimburg@prodigy.net](mailto:dlimburg@prodigy.net) by Wednesday, March 4<sup>th</sup>.

Bruce Allardice will discuss several of the mysteries surrounding the CSS Hunley. The Hunley was the first submarine to sink an enemy warship. After sinking the USS Housatonic, the Hunley disappeared beneath the waves, but continued to fascinate historians. Bruce will delve into the building of the Hunley as well as its first two disastrous test trials through the third tragic mission. He will detail the raising of the Hunley off Charleston Harbor in 1995. In the 1970's, popular author Clive Cussler financed the first of ultimately three expeditions which led to the raising of the Hunley. The submarine was moved to a facility where it could be stabilized, cleaned and have the interior excavated. The crew's remains were buried in a public ceremony in the Magnolia Cemetery in Charleston, S.C. What made the design of the Hunley unique? What went so tragically wrong? Come hear Bruce unravel some of the mysteries.





## The Chicago Mercantile Battery by Pat McCormick

Raising military units for the vast expansion of the U.S. Army in the Civil War was quite expensive, to say the least. Consequently, some state or local business groups would fund entire units – the 118<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteers, for example, were backed by the Corn Exchange of Philadelphia, and thus known as the Corn Exchange Regiment. On February 7, Wayne Rhine presented the story of one of Chicago's business-funded units: The Chicago Mercantile Battery.

Naturally, the battery was financially backed by the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, which was involved in the grain business and the I & M Canal, among other things. The battery, which was formed and saw its initial training at Camp Douglas in Chicago, was originally intended to be armed with the "coffee mill gun," a rather primitive attempt at a machine gun. This contraption turned out to be of limited use, and instead the Chicago Mercantile Battery was armed with conventional cannon, usually rifled guns. As was standard with artillery units, its 6 guns were divided into three 2-gun sections.

First commander of the unit was Captain Charles Cooley, for whom connections were apparently more important than genuine military acumen. (As Rhine commented, a classic Chicago situation.) Cooley spent much of his time diverting military supplies to the black market. Under Cooley's "leadership," the battery was sent to Memphis in November 1862, assigned to Morgan Smith's division of the Army of the Tennessee. Initially, the Mercantile Battery's main accomplishments were foraging and harassing local citizens; Rhine related that their first victory was against two Rebel pigs, killed and eaten. Cooley's less than stellar performance led to talk of disbanding the unit, but instead he was finally replaced by Captain Pat White.

White was a veteran of a distinguished artillery unit, Ezra Taylor's battery of Illinois, and under him the Mercantile Battery finally rounded into shape; during drills they used the sunken Confederate ram *General Beauregard* for target practice. The now-efficient battery saw its first action in December, 1862, during William T. Sherman's failed assault at Chickasaw Bluffs, north of Vicksburg. In early January of 1863, Sherman and John McClernand seized Fort Hindman at Arkansas Post, and a 2-gun section of the

Mercantile Battery saw action in that battle.

As the Vicksburg campaign entered its primary land campaign phase, the battery saw action at Port Gibson and Champion Hill, dueling a 10-gun Mississippi battery in the latter battle. A shot from the Mercantile battery killed Rebel general Lloyd Tilghman as his brigade covered the Confederate retreat from Champion Hill. The battery saw plenty of action at Vicksburg itself. On May 22, in action against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Texas Lunnette, a gun from the battery was advanced into the open against the enemy fort. Although the attack failed, the bold action resulted in a Medal of Honor for William Stephens – one of six Medals of Honor awarded to battery members for their work that day. Following the fall of Vicksburg, the battery accompanied an expedition against Jackson, Mississippi, where some of the members fell ill (possibly due to the poisoning of wells by the retreating enemy.)

Later in 1863, the battery was sent to Nathaniel Banks' Department of the Gulf, where Lieutenant Pinkney took command of the unit. In the new department, the Western 13<sup>th</sup> Corps (including the Mercantile boys) and the Eastern 19<sup>th</sup> Corps had friction between them, due to their different origins. After some R & R in Franklin, Louisiana, the Merc battery saw service at Matagorda Bay, Texas – a desolate area, short on rations and water. In this period, the battery seemed to excel mainly in chasing sheep; one member apparently wandered off and was lost, possibly joining the Rebels.

In the spring of 1864, Pinkney commanded the battery as part of the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps detachment in the Red River campaign (former commander Pat White was now chief of artillery for the corps.) During the Union retreat from the battle of Sabine Crossroads (aka Mansfield), the unit fell afoul of a traffic jam, and had to abandon all six guns to the enemy. No longer possessing its weaponry, the battery was sent to New Orleans to recuperate. Rather than being issued new cannon, the unit found itself given second-rate firearms and posted as garrison troops. This resulted in a great deal of discontent – a petition of protest was written, signed by 113 of the 119 members of the battery.

In response, their superior officer, Brigadier General Richard Arnold, somehow convinced a regular U.S. Army battery to surrender its guns to the Mercantile boys. The unit was also converted to horse artillery, and late in the war,



while based in Baton Rouge, participated in a few cavalry raids. These raids, and garrison duty (but at least garrison duty with actual cannon), filled out the remainder of the battery's service until they mustered out on July 3, 1865. By this time, only a handful of original members were still with the unit; the balance were replacements, many of them from the ranks of the infantry. Over the course of the war, the battery had 18 dead: Two officers and five enlisted men died in combat, while the remainder were felled by disease. In 1906, a monument to the unit was dedicated at Vicksburg National Military Park, the only official memorial to the battery in existence (it is the very first monument on the park tour, to the left just after passing through the archway.)

On behalf of the Round Table, I would like to thank Wayne Rhine for this account of the Chicago Mercantile Battery.

## **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 AM. On March 7, they will discuss 1861 battles: Lexington, MO and Ball's Bluff, VA.

## **Saturday Discussion**

All members and guests are invited to participate in the session to be held at the Barrington Area Library, 505 North Northwest Highway, Barrington, on March 21, from 10:00 a.m. until noon. The discussion topic will be the first day at Gettysburg.

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.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

March 10 – McHenry County CWRT  
“Old Abe and Friends”:  
Civil War Mascots  
speaker: Jan Rasmussen

March 13 – CWRT of Chicago  
VMI's Civil War Legacy  
presented by: David  
Sutherland

March 13 - Kenosha Civil War Mus.  
Second Friday Series  
Michigan's Anishinaabe  
Sharpshooters  
speaker: Sally Walker

March 20 - Salt Creek CWRT  
“The Tyranny of Public  
Discourse: Abraham  
Lincoln's Six Elements  
of Meaningful and  
Persuasive Writing”  
speaker: Dan VanHaften

## **Women's Civil War Book Club**

The Women's Civil War Book Club will meet on Saturday, April 4, 2020 at 2 P.M. The book to be discussed is *Confederates in the Attic* by Tony Horwitz. The meeting will be held at Connie Rawa's, 920 E. Northwest Highway in Palatine.

If you are interested in joining the group, please contact Denise Limburg at [dlimburg@prodigy.net](mailto:dlimburg@prodigy.net) or 847/212-5313 or Mary Banks at [zeller1@comcast.net](mailto:zeller1@comcast.net) or 847/497-3149.





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### Appointed Positions

Book Raffle	Charles Banks
Newsletter Editor	Denise Limburg

## BOOK RAFFLE

There was no book raffle at the February meeting. It will return in March!

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS

*The Real Horse Soldiers* (Grierson's Raid) by Timothy B. Smith

*The Vicksburg Assaults – May 19-22, 1863* also by Timothy B. Smith

from Pat McCormick

## 2019-2020 SPEAKERS

March 6	Bruce Allardice	"Mysteries of the Hunley"
April 3	Jack Hudson	Telegraphs in the Civil War
May 1	Kathryn Harris	Harriet Tubman
June 5	Max Daniels	President Lincoln: A Press Conference



To learn more about the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table  
visit our website at [www.northernilcwr.org](http://www.northernilcwr.org)