



# THE drum roll

407th Regular Meeting Volume 41 Number 9 May 3, 2024



## PLEASE NOTE!!!!

The May meeting will be in person at the Arlington Hts. Historical Society, May 3, 2024, and on ZOOM, at 7:00 P.M. The Historical Society Museum is located at 110 W. Fremont St. in Arlington Hts. This is just west, across the street from the library.

Our speaker for the May meeting is Jonathon Sebastian, who will talk about the 51<sup>st</sup> Illinois.

When Draftees Did Their Duty: Four Months in the 51st Illinois Infantry

In late summer of 1864, yet another draft occurred in the Northern states. One hundred ninety-two men from Northeastern Illinois made their way to Camp Douglas in response to this call. They were assigned to the 51st Illinois Infantry. If there was any thought that by the time they reached the front the fighting would have subsided for the season or the war would be over, they were sadly mistaken. In fact, they would see almost non-stop terrifying action for the next four months.

Jonathan Sebastian earned his B.A. in history from Judson College (now University) and his M.A. in Public History from Loyola University Chicago. He has been an adjunct professor of history at Judson University teaching World History 1500 to the Present and U.S. history. More recently, he was a social studies teacher at Woodlands Academy of the Sacred Heart. He was a tour guide at Jubilee College State Historic site outside of Peoria, Illinois, a project-based researcher at the Pritzker Military Library, and he was the curator of the Fischer Farm historic site in Bensenville, Illinois. Currently, he is an experience facilitator at the Arlington Heights Historical Museum and the education and programs assistant at the Elmhurst History Museum.

## ACTION PHOTOGRAPHS AT PORT HUDSON

Photography was in its infancy during the Civil War; photographs taken during battle were virtually unknown. But was that really the case? On April 5, Larry Hewitt led the Round Table through the “birth of combat photography.”

First and foremost, what constitutes a combat photo? Hewitt set the test as being taken in action, during battle. Most Civil War photos were produced once the combat was done. Photography of the time required long exposures, due to slow shutter speeds – thus the need for subjects to be still. The initial form of photography, the daguerreotype – invented in 1839 – allowed no flexibility. But the advent of wet plate photography in the 1840’s led to new opportunities and techniques, for those practitioners with the innovative spirit and talent to do so. This eventually led to pictures taken during live action; Hewitt mentioned (and showed) a photo of Union monitors in action against Fort Sumter in September 1863.

Among the prominent photographers to take advantage of the new possibilities was the duo of W.D. McPherson and J. Oliver. By 1860 they were established in New Orleans and were prolific photographers during the war. (In early 1863 they produced one of the iconic photographs of the period, a former slave whose back was a mass of scars from being whipped, known informally as “whipped Peter.”) They used a number of innovative procedures: Stereoscopic views, enlargements, composites, time lapse, and night time photography (which could then be switched to daylight in finished photographs.) Much of this involved making multiple reproductions from single glass negatives, or portions of negatives.

All of these new techniques would come into play when McPherson and Oliver took their business north to make an extensive documentation of the siege of Port Hudson, operating from June 14, 1863, to just after the July 9 surrender of the bastion. The resulting photographs have traditionally been identified as being taken post-siege, but Hewitt went on to demonstrate that they were not only taken during the siege but even during actual combat. (Why did McPherson and Oliver go to such lengths? To make money, of course.)

Hewitt ran through a variety of examples. (The presentation was, of necessity, highly visual; unfortunately, this means the full impact of the experience can’t really be conveyed in this article. Thus it is a little shorter than standard.) The duo started out taking photographs of Union headquarters; a couple different ones used by Nathaniel Banks, one of Cuvier Grover’s, and Godfrey Weitzel’s. All of these, while behind the front lines, were taken as the siege was in process.

Different photos of Battery #7 were used to illustrate the shifting nature of the position as the action progressed, by both the position of cannonballs and of the guns themselves; the cannon clearly were shifted within the fortification as the siege progressed, a key indicator that the photographs were taken during active operations. Battery #21 was only in existence from June 19 to June 22; the picture of that installation had to have been taken during the siege, not afterwards.

A photograph of Battery #11 was possibly the first photograph ever taken at night, Hewitt revealed; records indicate it was taken about midnight. But when published, the sky was adjusted to daylight, one of the new techniques previously mentioned. A different picture of Battery #11, taken either a day before or a day after the midnight photo, shows all six guns loaded and ready to fire—clearly taken in the midst of bombardment. Smoke in the distance, identified as a campfire, is in fact most likely residual from the impact of a shell in the distance—once again indicating the scene as being during combat.

Perhaps the most clear example of an action shot is a photo of a “cavalier”—an earthwork banked up about 15 feet higher than trench level, filled with dirt and cotton bales, for use by sharpshooters. A close look reveals not only the structural details of the cavalier, but number of sharpshooters themselves, plugging away at the enemy. Another interesting site is what was known as the “cotton bale battery”; white tufts of cotton are clearly visible strewn about the emplacement. And a July 8 photograph of Battery #9 (taken one day before the surrender) shows a cannon in place that, by the records, was removed later that morning. Again, this could only have been taken during siege operations, not afterwards as this series of photographs is traditionally considered to have been taken.

Overall, it seems beyond dispute that these images were taken during active operations and even at times in the midst of combat. On behalf of the Round Table I would like to thank Larry Hewitt for this journey through what he termed as among the most significant photographs of the Civil War.

Pat McCormick



## Speaker List

Sept. 1, 2023: Jerry Allen: Old Abe the War Eagle  
Oct. 6, 2023: Bruce Allardice: "Loose Lips"--  
Military Secrecy During the Civil War  
Nov. 3, 2023: Dave Powell Grant at Chattanooga  
Dec. 1, 2023 Rob Girardi Stonewall Jackson  
Jan. 5, 2024: Larry Hewitt Combat Photography  
Feb. 2, 2024: Dennis Doyle Illinois Units at  
Gettysburg  
Mar. 1, 2024: Steve Alban: The Election of 1860  
Apr. 5, 2024: Lawrence Hewitt Photographs of  
Port Hudson  
May 3, 2024: Jon Sebastian When Draftees Did  
Their Duty: Four Months in the 51<sup>st</sup> Illinois Infantry  
June 7, 2024: Diana Dretske: The Bonds of War:  
The 96<sup>th</sup> Illinois  
Sept. 6, 2024: Leslie Goddard TBA  
Oct. 4, 2024: TBA  
Nov. 1, 2024: Doug Stiles: Lincoln's Watch  
Dec. 6, 2024: Gordon Ramsey: Music of the Civil  
War

## MANHUNT

This Apple+TV series is being streamed on TV weekly. It is not free. You need to subscribe to Apple+TV. It is based on the Non-Fiction book by James L. Swanson "The 12 Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer" published in 2006. Most critics and historians have spoken favorably about it. I watched the whole production and enjoyed it.

JR

## 2023-24 Officers and Trustees

President	Bruce Allardice
1 <sup>st</sup> Vice President	Jerry Allen
2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice President	Wayne Rhine
Secretary	
Treasurer	Pat McCormick
Assistant Treasurer	
Membership	
Historian	Pat McCormick
Trustee	Tom Gavigan (2024)
Trustee (2024)	Fred Reczkowitz
Trustee	Danielle Kafka (2026)
Trustee	Susan Hirsch
Trustee	Alisa Corsi (2028)
Trustee	Laurie Schiller

## Appointed Positions

Newsletter Editor Jerry Rodosky

[gjrodosky@gmail.com](mailto:gjrodosky@gmail.com)

847-420-1639

## Upcoming Events

At this time, we are not charging dues for the 2023-2024 year.

Join Zoom Meeting on Friday, May 3, 2024, at 7 PM.

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

## Important Announcements!!!!!!

Our Saturday discussion group met on Saturday, April 20, 2024, via ZOOM. Pat McCormick led a small but vigorous discussion about George Thomas and the Atlanta campaign. A few things that were brought out about The Rock of Chickamauga included the fact that he had an accident in New York some time earlier and had a bad back. He was forced to move slowly and deliberately. Some mistook this as a slow-moving old man. Not the case. Thomas also made significant improvements in the ability to update and reproduce maps. He also established the first National Cemetery at Chickamauga.

Join us on May 18, 2024, at 10 AM, on ZOOM, for our next Saturday discussion when we will take up a discussion of Fighting Joe Hooker.

We have shortened our Saturday discussion to attract more participants. It will go from 10 AM to around 11:30 AM. Please try to get in on this. Pat does a great job, and everyone can jump in on the discussion. Our participation has increased. Let's continue the trend.

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