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Battle Cry

Founded 1961,
Newsletter of the Sacramento Civil War Round Table
P.O. BOX 254702
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President's Message

Drawing again from last month's book, **BREAK It UP**, New York was a fiercely Democratic City with business ties to the South. Firms sold so many goods - clothing, pianos, tools - to slave plantations that they advertised as devoted "Exclusively to the Southern Trade." Wall Street financiers grew rich as cotton brokers. The New York Post observed, "New York belongs almost as much to the South as the North. Southern succession would have serious repercussions for the City's economy. Deprived of its trade with the slave states, New York would be drained of its wealth and influence.

Despite its pro-slave sympathies, however, the City would suffer with the rest of the North if the Country broke apart or went to war. Southerners began boycotting Northern companies. Planters owed millions of dollars to New York firms, debts the speculators feared would be renounced. Within weeks of the election, the City's economy was in free fall.

Desperate editors and businessmen talking up an extraordinary idea -- New York could secede from the State and the Union and establish an independent free City. In the first week of 1861, with South Carolina already out of the Union and other states not far behind, New York's Mayor submitted a proposal to the City Council. Secession made as much sense for New York as for the slave states.

Well into the spring, independence remained popular among businessmen, who didn't want to lose Southern trade and lower-class laborers who didn't want to compete with former slaves.

Up to the moment that late late-night when reports from Charleston Harbor roused the City, New York as in independent City-State remained a real possibility.

Dennis Kohlmann, President

MINUTES
SACRAMENTO CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE
Wednesday, June 9, 2021
HOF BRAU RESTAURANT, 2500 WATT AVENUE, SACRAMENTO

ATTENDANCE – 0:

MEMBERS – 0: No meeting and no Members.

GUESTS – 0: No meeting and no Guests.

1. No meeting. Meetings are cancelled until further notice due to COVID-19. The Hof Brau is open to decreased inside dining but closes at 6:30 PM.
2. The next Board Meeting is unknown at this time.

George W. Foxworth for Vacant, Secretary

Treasurer's Report

The cash balance on June 9th was \$4,438.92. No meeting and no raffle.

George W. Foxworth, Treasurer

Coming Programs for 2021

Date	Speaker	Topic
July 14th	"No Speaker"	"No Topic"
August 11th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"
September 8th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"
October 13th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"
November 10th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"
December 8th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"

2021 Membership

The 2021 membership renewal was due as of January 1, 2021. The dues are \$30.00 and you can renew and send to the Treasurer through the mail. For all checks, make them payable to **Sacramento Civil War Round Table** and send them to:

George W. Foxworth
9463 Salishan Court
Sacramento, CA 95826-5233

NOTE: 2020 memberships are good for 2021 due to COVID-19.

NEWSLETTER CIVIL WAR ARTICLES

Civil War articles/book reviews are welcome. The submission deadline is the first of each month for that month's **Battle Cry**. However, you can submit articles at anytime. Please submit your items in Microsoft Word or regular email to:

gwfoxworth@sbcglobal.net

The **Battle Cry** is the monthly newsletter of the Sacramento CWRT. Submissions are subject to availability of space and size limitations. Submissions do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization or the Editor. The official address of this organization is: Sacramento Civil War Round Table, Post Office Box 254702, Sacramento, CA 95865-4702. <http://www.sacramentocwrt.org> is the web site address. Check the web for past newsletter editions and information about the group.

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

The Friends of Civil War Alcatraz (FOCWA) is a group of individuals interested in the Civil War history of Alcatraz island. We are made up of teachers, veterans, historians, and others who like to research and read about how Alcatraz became an important Fort for the protection of San Francisco during the Civil War.

Some of our members are also National Park Service volunteers who assist the rangers in giving public programs, in uniform, about the Union soldiers stationed on the Island and interesting events that occurred there between 1859 and 1865. We publish a newsletter every month, which can be found on our website www.friendsofcivilwaralcatraz.org.

We also visit schools and organizations to tell that early history of the Island, long before it became the notorious Federal prison. And we conduct living history days twice a year, in conjunction with the American Civil War Association, to give the public an idea of what the Island was like as a Union Fort.

Submitted by Steve Johnson

Lydia Bixby

Lydia Parker was born in Rhode Island to English immigrants sometime in the year 1801. Her family moved to Hopkinton, Massachusetts where she met her future husband, Cromwell Bixby. Bixby was a bootmaker and sixth generation Puritan described as a “quiet, inoffensive man.” The couple married on September 26, 1826 and had six sons and three daughters together. All their sons, at one time or another, worked with their father in the footwear trade. In 1854, Cromwell suddenly died of a “fit” at the age of 51.



Now a widow with nine children, Lydia moved the family to Boston, believing it would be easier for them to find work there. She took in sewing and worked as a nurse, housekeeper and, some say, a madam. The family moved seven times in the first two years, perhaps keeping one step ahead of the landlord.

When the Civil War began, the Bixby boys stepped up to do their duty. Charles and Arthur Edward, always called “Edward,” had both enlisted by July 1861, Henry enlisted in August 1862, and Oliver and George joined in February and March of 1864.

In the fall of 1864, the Widow Bixby visited General Schouler, the Adjutant General of Massachusetts. She brought with her “five letters from five different commanders” each informing her of the death of one of her sons in battle. Lydia claimed to be destitute with no sons left to help support her. Taking her word at face value, Schouler only asked for a list with the dates when her sons had died and the names of the battlefields where they had been killed. The list was never sent. Nevertheless, General Schouler wrote to his higher ups about this remarkable story and by the end of October, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton put his letter on the President’s desk.

On November 21, *The Boston Evening Traveler* and *The Boston Evening Transcript* put out appeals for money and food donations to provide “good Thanksgiving dinners” to the families of soldiers serving in the field. Schouler added a plea for, “a poor but most worthy widow lady...who sent five sons into this War, all the children she had, every one of whom has fallen nobly in battle” He delivered the food and cash donations to Mrs. Bixby on November 24, Thanksgiving Day. The following day, she was honored with a letter from President Lincoln expressing his sincere condolences on the tragic loss of her sons.

Executive Mansion Washington, Nov. 21, 1864

Dear Madam,-I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts, that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle.

I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the

grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save.

I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours, to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of Freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

A. Lincoln

The Bixby letter is considered to be one of the “masterpieces of the English language.” The authorship has been hotly disputed, many claiming that John Hay, Lincoln’s Private Secretary, wrote it. Today most historians credit Lincoln with writing it. When it was published, the newspapers were filled with harsh criticism for the Lincolns having their 21 year-old son, Robert, “kept at home in luxury, far from the dangers of the field.”

No one knows what happened to the original letter. One of Mrs. Bixby’s granddaughters told *The Boston Herald* that it was destroyed by her grandmother who “had great sympathy for the South” and had “little good to say of President Lincoln.”

Lydia Bixby died in Massachusetts General Hospital on October 27, 1878. She is buried in the unmarked grave #423, along with her 21 year old grandson, Charles, in Mount Hope Cemetery in Boston, Massachusetts. She had been receiving an \$8 a month pension after her son Oliver’s death along with \$4 monthly for “being crippled with rheumatism from living in a cellar.”



The red flower marks Lydia Bixby's resting place.

Years after her death, it was revealed that her story was untrue. Of the five Bixby sons, two were killed, two deserted, and one was honorably discharged.

During wartime, the socialite, Sarah Cabot Wheelwright, and her friends hired Bixby to do some household tasks for them. They also raised money to buy gifts and small necessities for the soldiers in hospitals or in the field. When the police learned that Wheelwright had asked one of the Bixby sons to deliver the gifts, she received an admonishing letter from the police. It revealed that Lydia Bixby “kept a house of ill fame, was perfectly untrustworthy and as bad as she could be.” Her sons were “tough” and “some of them too fond of drink.” One historian frankly wrote that Mrs. Bixby was “a liar and a schemer who sought to exploit patriotic feeling during the War for her own personal gain.” Mrs. Wheelwright admitted that though the widow was “motherly looking, she had shifty eyes.”

The Bixby Brothers:

Sergeant Charles Bixby, age 22, (Company D, 20th Massachusetts) was KIA on May 3, 1863, near Fredericksburg, Virginia. Before leaving for War, he had purchased six months of groceries for his mother. Charles is either buried in an unknown grave on the Battlefield or in Fredericksburg National Cemetery.

Private Oliver Cromwell Bixby, age 36, (Company E, 58th Massachusetts Infantry) was KIA at The Battle of the Crater on July 30, 1864 near Petersburg, Virginia after an enlistment of just over five months. He was missing the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. This ordinarily would have made him ineligible for service but he enlisted in Brookline where they were desperate for volunteers and giving "hefty bonuses." After his death, his son, Charles, from his first marriage, went to live with his grandmother. Oliver is either buried in an unmarked grave on the Battlefield or in Poplar Grove National Cemetery, Virginia. His pension went to his second wife and two children.

Private Edward Bixby (Company C, 1st Massachusetts) deserted on May 28, 1862. He had been given 12 hours leave and never returned to his Unit. His mother pleaded for him not to be prosecuted as he had been underage (17) when he enlisted and was "subject to fits of insanity" since he was a child. He wasn't prosecuted as he couldn't be found. Edward had spent a great deal of time in reform schools growing up. Years later, he claimed that he had enlisted in the Army three times under three different names, served as a soldier in Chile and Paraguay and worked as a mechanic in Rio de Janeiro before he returned home. Records show that in 1870, he was incarcerated in the Suffolk County House of Corrections for larceny. Edward died in 1909, age 65, and is buried in Forest Hill Cemetery, Forest Hill Park, Illinois.

Corporal Henry Cromwell Bixby (20th, 32nd and 62nd Massachusetts Infantry Regiments) was captured at Gettysburg and sent to a POW camp in Richmond, Virginia. He was paroled on March 7, 1864 and honorably discharged in December 1865. Henry suffered from rheumatism associated with his War service. During most of his time in the Army, he had served as the Company Cook. He had been mistakenly listed as killed at Gettysburg. Henry returned to the boot-making profession after the War. He died, age 41, on November 8, 1871 of tuberculosis that he had contracted during the War. He was buried with full military honors in Oak Grove Cemetery in Milford, Massachusetts. Henry was married twice but did not have any offspring.

Private George Way Bixby (Company B, 56th Massachusetts Infantry) was captured at Petersburg, Virginia on July 30, 1864. He was held prisoner in Richmond but then was transferred to a prison in North Carolina. He either died there or, it is believed more likely, deserted to the Confederate Army. He had a long history of youthful indiscretions and had been found guilty, on July 3, 1858, of breaking and entering a shop. At that time, he was sentenced to four years in a Rhode Island prison.

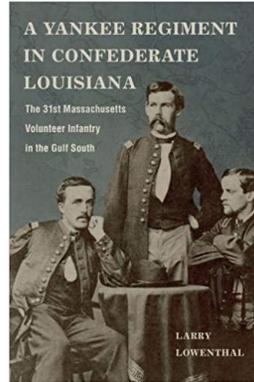
One way or another, it seems that Mrs. Bixby and her sons did their share of suffering during the War.

Submitted by Judith Breitstein

A Yankee Regiment in Confederate Louisiana: The 31st Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in the Gulf South

By Larry Lowenthal. Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2019. 360 pp. \$48.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-7190-5.

Reviewed by Brianna Kirk (University of Virginia). Published on H-CivWar (July, 2020). Commissioned by G. David Schieffler.



Larry Lowenthal's *A Yankee Regiment in Confederate Louisiana* tells the story of the 31st Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, which served most of the American Civil War in Louisiana and the Gulf Region. The Regiment is credited as the first Union Regiment to enter New Orleans after its capture and the Confederate evacuation in 1862. It also served in a variety of roles--as infantry, mounted infantry, and cavalry--and fought guerrillas in the Louisiana bayous. Yet its relatively unique story of dignified service never made it into the pages of an official regimental history, as the men of the 31st never succeeded in writing one. Despite their late start in beginning a Veterans' Association, they diligently collected material, conducted interviews, and amassed accounts to write a detailed account of their service. But the old veterans, including the regimental historian, began passing away before anything could be published.

Lowenthal, a former National Park Service historian, set out to accomplish what the men of the 31st Massachusetts did not--to write the history of the oft-forgotten Massachusetts regiment whose Civil War service has typically evoked criticism. After the discovery of unprocessed diaries, manuscripts, and personal reminiscences in the Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History in 2013, Lowenthal committed to writing a "modern Civil War regimental history," one that would benefit from the abundance of modern scholarship and interpretations. Writing the regimental history now, instead of in the late Nineteenth Century, would also likely remove any personal bias that modern historians often find plague Civil War regimental histories and allow him to take a

more "balanced perspective" on many issues that would have generated "political controversies" among Civil War veterans (pp. xii-xiii).

Lowenthal's methodology and source base for this modern regimental history are fascinating. He draws largely from these unpublished and unprocessed manuscript collections, boxes of material which had been collected by the Regiment's designated historian, L. Frederick Rice. Chronology drives Lowenthal's account of the 31st Massachusetts from their inception in 1861 to their journey South to Louisiana to their service in the Gulf. Broken down into chapters that cover several months at a time, this narrative structure allows readers to immerse themselves in the soldiers' lives and to experience the flow of their service alongside the men. Beginning with Benjamin Butler's recruitment of New Englanders to serve in the Union Army, Lowenthal traces how controversy plagued the 31st Massachusetts from the start and continued through its service in Louisiana. An ongoing feud between Butler and Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew--prompted initially by Butler's recruitment efforts and his insistence on appointing officers to those regiments--was felt throughout the ranks of the 31st well into the War, as the men began to question why they had not seen any major combat by the end of 1862. Despite the honor of being the first Union troops to set foot in New Orleans after the Union gained possession of the City in 1862, the 31st Massachusetts found their Regiment split up and relegated to coastal defense at Fort Pike, Fort Jackson, and defending the rail lines to Jackson, Mississippi, at Kennerville (now Kenner).

One of the most unique aspects of the 31st Massachusetts Regiment was the variety of service they saw. Throughout the Civil War, these men took on the role of infantry, mounted infantry, and cavalry. They found themselves on guard duty, took part in siege warfare, and fought guerrillas. The pace at which Lowenthal tells the 31st Massachusetts's story accelerates as he begins describing their involvement in the lead-up and attack on Port Hudson, Louisiana, and continues with his account of their participation in the Red River Campaign in early to mid-1864. In both of these instances, Lowenthal's reliance on these newly acquired diaries and personal papers increases, providing more rounded accounts of the soldiers' experiences that texturize the reader's understanding of these moments. It is in these chapters that Lowenthal provides a much richer analysis of what the men of the 31st wrote and why. Examples of their personal views on race, emancipation, African American soldiers, and occupation come through, although including more accounts would have reinforced that analysis more. Even more so, it becomes evident that this regiment in particular recognized--perhaps because of their limited exposure to combat or because of their somewhat jaded view of their service--that their involvement in the Gulf Region was "little more than a distraction" to the overall War effort compared to

the campaigns in the East, and that the War "would be decided far to the east of the Mississippi" (p. 187).

Writing a "modern regimental history" is a notable task, especially when relying heavily on unpublished material gathered by the Regiment's members themselves. Lowenthal does leave some to be desired, especially connections to current scholarship. For example, his discussion of soldier opinions and views on race in the chapter covering the first half of 1863 offers a great opportunity to connect the soldiers' words to recent works on Union soldiers and their changing attitudes toward emancipation, or how conceptions of their masculinity shifted with experiencing no major combat compared to their counterparts in the East. Though there are hints of these throughout, more explicit connections to larger trends currently seen in the field of Civil War history are needed. Lowenthal does a nice job of integrating the soldiers' own words into a seamless descriptive narrative, but at many places--especially in the chapters on Port Hudson and the Red River Campaign--allowing the soldiers to speak for themselves even more would have been a bonus.

Lastly, a final chapter taking the Regiment from wartime service into the Reconstruction and Gilded Age years--the prime time for regimental histories--would have provided a fitting end to Lowenthal's story, and the absence of such a chapter leaves readers curious about what happened after the War's conclusion. When did Rice, the Regiment's historian, acquire the majority of accounts on which Lowenthal's story is based? What was the process like for Lowenthal as he wrote this, and what different shape does he think the history would have taken had Rice accomplished his task? A reflective end to this creative and interesting project would have been welcomed.

Lowenthal breathes life into the men of the 31st Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry and provides a captivating account of a Regiment that did not claim many crowning achievements like other Massachusetts regiments did. But the disappointments and neglect felt in their own time does not mean they should continue to be forgotten today, as their service, experiences, and opinions of the Civil War world in which they lived lend important insight into soldier experiences that historians now and in the future will continue to investigate. ***A Yankee Regiment in Confederate Louisiana*** succeeds in revealing ways modern historians can still benefit from Civil War regimental histories, even from a distance of over one hundred and fifty years later.

Submitted by Bruce A. Castleman, Ph.D.

2021 WEST COAST CIVIL WAR CONFERENCE

November 5 - 7, 2021



WYNDHAM GARDEN HOTEL, 5090 East Clinton Way, FRESNO, CA 93727-1506, (1-559-252-3611 or 1-559-494-4992), \$103.00 per night, or wydhamguestreservations.com, (Fresno Airport).

“Combat Strategy & Tactics; Lee vs Grant in 1864.”

HOSTED BY THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY CWRT. For more information, see Website: SJVCWRT2.com

SPEAKERS:

**Gordon Rhea;
Eric Wittenburg;
Chris Mackowski;
Jim Stanbery, MA.; Professor (Retired) &
Brian Clague.**

TOPICS: In Progress.

Ron Vaughan, MA.; (Conference Coordinator: ronvaughan@prodigy.net).

ATTENDEE REGISTRATION: \$200.00 PER PERSON for Weekend, including meals. Breakfast on your own. Coffee, water, and pastries provided during the Conference. (Non participants who wish Dinner Friday or Saturday nights: \$30.00 each meal.)

Name _____

Address _____

Phone(s) _____

Email _____

Member of which CWRT/ORG _____

Address Check to **San Joaquin Valley CWRT.**

Send Check and Registration to: **Ron Vaughan (Conference Coordinator), 730 East Tulare Avenue, Tulare, CA 93274-4336.**