



# THE drum roll

Volume 37 361st Regular Meeting  
Number 10 June 7, 2019

## *Pioneer example of the educated career woman*

Friday, June 7, 2019, 6:00 p.m.

Concorde Banquets  
20922 North Rand Road, Kildeer, Illinois

### Louisa May Alcott's Civil War



Leslie Goddard

American women in the mid-Nineteenth Century lived in a world that remained fairly constant regarding the traditional roles for men and women going back to the ancient world.

Yet more and more women were becoming highly educated and were participating in the great events on par with men. Some staked their own way in this world and created their own very successful careers and lasting legacies. Many of these intrepid women are well known in Civil War history as great leaders and pioneers in the fields of as nursing, education, and writing. One such American woman of that time excelled in all these areas — and more.

For our 37th annual banquet and final meeting of this club year, Leslie Goddard will present novelist, short story writer, poet, abolitionist, and Civil War nurse, Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888).

Alcott's early education included instruction from Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Julia Ward Howe. Starting out as a teacher, she was hired in 1860 by the *Atlantic Monthly* and served for a period at a Union hospital at Georgetown. Her time serving as a nurse is probably the least-known aspect of her career. Although short, it was profound to her and is considered pivotal in inspiring her to write her classic, *Little Women*, as well as influencing her abolitionism. She kept a journal and wrote quite a few letters during this period that were later published in newspapers and became the basis for her second book, *Hospital Sketches*. Like some of her peers, Alcott left an indelible mark on the Civil War — a pioneer example of the educated career professional woman that would one day become a norm in American society.

Leslie Goddard, an award-winning actress and scholar, has presented history programs for more than ten years. She holds a Ph.D. from Northwestern University specializing in American studies and U.S. history, as well as a master's degree in theater. A former museum director, she is the author of two books on local history: *Remembering Marshall Field's* and *Chicago's Sweet Candy History*. She now works full-time as an author and public speaker. Her programs have been presented for hundreds of museums, libraries, senior centers, local radio and television, and other organizations around the country. In her own words: "I portray memorable women from the past and tell historical stories so that lessons from the past are more entertaining and educational."

If you would like to join us for this presentation by Leslie Goddard at the 37th annual banquet meeting June 7, please send your reservation and dinner payment to Pat McCormick by May 25.

**Dues payments for the 2019–2020 club year are now being accepted**

# Those Infernal Machines

By Pat McCormick

**A**s a less populous, less industrialized nation at war with a stronger neighbor, the Confederate States of America realized early on that the technology available might significantly aid their efforts. One of the most effective, if pernicious, technologies was that of mines, both land and water. On May 3, Bruce Allardice presented their story to the round table.

Mines were only one of a variety of innovations the Confederacy introduced during the Civil War; others were the submarine, the aircraft carrier, and the railroad gun. But mines were by far the most important. In fact, they were often referred to not as “mines” but as “torpedoes” (a word whose meaning would change by the outset of the 20th Century). The term “torpedo” was coined by Robert Fulton (best known as the inventor of the steamboat) after the torpedo fish, which uses electric shock to stun its prey. Likewise, Civil War torpedoes were often electrically activated — either from an internal fuse or remotely from attached wires.

Primitive mines were first used by the Chinese some 500 years before the Civil War. More recently, they were used during the Crimean War of 1845–55, the Russians having particular success with them. Their use opened up a debate: were they morally objectionable, according to the “laws of war”? For most of the U.S. Civil War, the Union — considering mines dishonorable — rejected this form of warfare. Granted, mines were — and are — primarily a weapon used for static defense, a situation that mostly benefitted the Confederacy.

The CSA used mines both on land and in water. During the 1862 Peninsula Campaign, Brigadier General Gabriel Rains devised land mines for placement in the defenses of Yorktown; later, they were used in fixed defenses at various locations along the Confederate coast. The most notable of these was at Fort McAllister, guarding the approaches to Savannah, Georgia. In December 1864, General William T. Sherman’s forces encountered the “infernal machines” on the approach to McAllister; the enraged Sherman placed

Confederate prisoners in front of his own soldiers, forcing them to probe for mines and dig them up when encountered.

However, the primary use of mines was in the water, as a deterrent to Union naval operations. A number of types were employed by the Confederates, and as the war progressed the Rebels refined and standardized the hardware as far as they could, given their resources. One common type of mine used a keg as a basis: it was packed with powder, capped on both ends, and fitted with a trigger device (usually a contact trigger, though sometimes electrically detonated from covered positions on the shore). The keg-based mines floated but were hard to see. Another type was the frame mine, in which artillery shells were mounted to timbers and placed on a river bottom, with pressure contacts in a position to be struck by the hulls of enemy ships. Other mines, called spar mines, were anchored to the bottom and swayed with the current, awaiting an unsuspecting vessel to come in contact with them.

Mines were generally more to be feared than Confederate vessels. On December 12, 1862, the ironclad gunboat USS *Cairo* — veteran of the riverine warfare so prevalent earlier in the year — became the first ship ever sunk by an electrically activated mine while steaming into action in the Yazoo River north of Vicksburg. (After 100 years under the Yazoo, *Cairo* was raised in the 1960s and her well-preserved remains are on display in Vicksburg today.) Another famous mine victim was the monitor USS *Tecumseh* at Mobile Bay in August 1864; her sinking, and the resulting hesitation of other Union ships to proceed, led to one of the most famous exclamations in U.S. history, by Admiral David G. Farragut: “Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!”

Although mines/torpedoes were primarily defensive in nature, they were used offensively in naval warfare as well, by both sides. The Rebel vessel *Hunley* — first submarine in history to sink an enemy ship in combat — used a mine on the end of a long boom, known as a “spar torpedo,” to

sink the USS *Housatonic* in February 1864. (*Hunley* herself sank later in that same sortie, was found and raised in the 2000s, and is now being restored in South Carolina.)

Both sides used above-water torpedo boats as well; the feared Confederate ironclad *Albemarle* was done in by a light launch with a spar torpedo, under command of William B. Cushing. Another potential offensive use of mines was the “horo-logical torpedo,” essentially a time bomb. One of these caused a massive explosion at the Union supply base in City Point, near Petersburg, in 1864. Additionally, the use of a “coal torpedo” was suspected in the explosion of the over-crowded steamboat *Sultana* in the Mississippi River, in summer 1865 — but that was probably not the case.

Overall, Confederate torpedoes sank 29 Union combat vessels and damaged 14 others, a total greater than the damage inflicted by Rebel warships and shore batteries combined. (Southern mines also sank four of their own ships.) Although never close to being a decisive weapon, water mines did often impact Union naval progress, buying time for land defenders to escape intact when necessary.

Jefferson Davis and Union Admiral David Porter, as well as historians since then, paid tribute to the effectiveness of the infernal machines. And other countries took note; mine warfare would become a staple of future conflicts.

On behalf of the round table, I would like to thank Bruce Allardice for his in-depth (no pun intended) look at torpedoes, and also for his notes (allowing me to reconstruct a presentation I wish I'd been able to attend).

## June 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 Saturday, June 15, from 10:00 a.m. until noon. Pat McCormick will lead the discussion on Franklin and Nashville.

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.

*drum roll*, June 2019

## Summer Events

**June 8, The Grand Review.** Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. A Celebration of the Civil War Museum's 11th Anniversary will feature music, demonstrations, Civil War-themed activities, and hands-on family activities, as well as free admission to the museum's Fiery Trial gallery, 10 a.m.–4 p.m. Information on all Civil War Museum programs is available at (262) 653-4140 or [www.thecivilwarmuseum.org](http://www.thecivilwarmuseum.org).

**June 11, McHenry County Civil War Round Table.** Frank Crawford will speak on Leeds Cannon at the Boone County Historical Museum.

**June 14, Second Friday Lecture Series,** Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Gene Salecker will speak on Alabama's Cahaba Prison, noon. Free program is sponsored by the Milwaukee Civil War Round Table and the Iron Brigade Association.

**June 14, Chicago Civil War Round Table.** Doug Dammann will speak on Elmer Ellsworth and His Zouave Cadets.

**June 21, Salt Creek Civil War Round Table.** Pamela Toler will speak on From Unwanted to Indispensable: The Real Nurses of the Civil War.

**July 9, McHenry County Civil War Round Table.** Steve Acker will speak on Petersburg.

**July 12, Second Friday Lecture Series,** Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Dr. Ann Keating will speak on Juliette Kinzie, the Civil War, and the Making of Chicago, noon. Free program is sponsored by the Milwaukee Civil War Round Table and the Iron Brigade Association.

**July 13, Civil War Museum,** Kenosha, WI. Mike Larson will tell the story of Henry F. Young, an officer in the Iron Brigade, through 155 letters to his family in southwestern Wisconsin, 1 p.m.

**August 3–4, U.S.S. Minnesota Naval Encampment,** Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. The encampment and demonstrations pertain to the navy's part in the Civil War from 1861–1865, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Saturday, 11 a.m.–4 p.m. Sunday.

**August 9, Second Friday Lecture Series,** Civil War Museum, Kenosha, WI. Lance Herdegen will speak on Badgers in Grey: The 2nd Wisconsin at Bull Run, noon. Free program is sponsored by the Milwaukee Civil War Round Table and the Iron Brigade Association.

**August 10, McHenry County Civil War Round Table.** Show and tell.



## 2017–18 Officers and Trustees

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### Appointed Positions

Book Raffle	Charles Banks
Newsletter Editor	Sally Smith

## Book Raffle

The lucky winners at the May book raffle were Ezra Maras, who won *Civil War Fathers: Sons of the Civil War in World War II* edited by Tim Pletkovich; Mike Brown, who won *No Better Place To Die: The Battle of Stones River* by Peter Cozzens; Alisa Corsi, who won *East and West* by C. Northcote Parkinson; Walt Parus, who won *Battle of Big Bethel: Crucial Clash in Early Civil War Virginia* by J. Michael Cobb, Edward B. Hicks, and Wythe Holt; Mark W. Ostrand, who won *Chicago's Battery Boys: The Chicago Mercantile Battery in the Civil War's Western Theater* by Richard Brady Williams; and Bill Lax, who won *Bloody Roads South: The Wilderness to Cold Harbor, May–June 1864* by Noah Andre Trudeau.

Congratulations to the winners and sincere thanks to the donors.

## 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 to 11:30 a.m. On June 1 the group will finish discussing the Lincoln assassination and then switch to Shiloh.

## Women's Civil War Book Club

The Civil War book club for women will meet at the home of Denise Limburg at 2 p.m. on Saturday, June 8, to discuss *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. If you are interested in joining the group, contact Denise Limburg at (847) 212-5313 or [dlimburg@prodigy.net](mailto:dlimburg@prodigy.net) or Mary Banks at (847) 497-3149 or [zeller1@comcast.net](mailto:zeller1@comcast.net).

## In Memoriam

Long-time member and past president of the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table George Dailey passed away in May 2019. Our condolences to his family and friends.

## Banquet Raffle



Jerry and Ellen Allen donated a framed print of Old Abe, the War Eagle, to be raffled off at the June banquet.

Charlie Banks is selling tickets for this raffle. Tickets are \$2 each or three for \$5. All proceeds go to the Sites Fund.

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