



THE drum roll

400th Regular Meeting Volume 41 Number 2 October 6, 2023



PLEASE NOTE!!!!

The October meeting will be in person at the Arlington Hts. Historical Society on Friday, October 6, 2023, and on ZOOM, at 7:00 P.M. The Arlington Hts. Museum is located at 110 W. Fremont St. in Arlington Hts. This is across the street from the library, just west.

OLD ABE THE BATTLE EAGLE

In the Civil War, animal mascots (especially dogs) were a common occurrence. On September 1, current President Jerry Allen illustrated the story of the most famous, and celebrated, mascot: the eagle of the 8th Wisconsin.

Allen first briefly covered the history of the eagle as a symbolic - not live - symbol going all the way back to Roman times, continuing through the founding of our country and the Napoleonic era. He also mentioned what was surely the most unusual live mascot of the Civil War: Old Douglas, the camel associated with the 43rd Mississippi. He then moved on to Old Abe's story.

This began in Jim Falls, Wisconsin, where a Chippewa chief chopped down a pine tree to reach the two eaglets in a nest at the top. One died in the fall, but the chief took the other one, then traded him to local resident Daniel McCann for a bushel of corn. Soon realizing that it would be difficult to take care of an eagle, McCann sold him to a company of soldiers from Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties. They would become Company C of the 8th Wisconsin; originally known as the "Badger Company," they would soon become the "Eagle Company."

As the company traveled to join the rest of the forming regiment, they passed through LaCrosse, where a local offered the company's Captain Perkins \$200.00 for the eagle. The reply: No amount of money could buy the bird. (Allen noted that the eagle's worth was increasing: first a bushel of corn, then \$2.50 for the soldiers to buy him, now \$200.00 wouldn't do it). When the company reached Madison, Perkins named the eagle "Old Abe." Abe's fame began increasing along with his value; soon thereafter he was mentioned in newspapers in Chicago and even New York.

Old Abe was an immature eagle throughout the war, not yet developing the iconic white head and white tail feathers (although public illustrations of the eagle often showed him in the more classic style). A special perch was constructed for the mascot, the front of which had a shield bearing the Stars and Stripes, with arrowheads pointing outwards. (Over the course of the war, the arrowheads were gradually lost). A 16 to 20-foot tether kept Abe connected to his perch. It was wound around the arrows when in battle, to give the eagle perhaps 3 feet of “play” in the tether.

In any regiment, bearing the colors was a prestigious – and dangerous in combat – job. Bearing the 8th Wisconsin’s eagle was also a prestigious position, perhaps not quite as risky as color bearer, but prestigious nonetheless. Old Abe would have five different bearers during his three years of service, all of them from Company C. The eagle also had to be fed, of course. His primary food source was beef, with an occasional rabbit or squirrel when available. Minnows were a particular delicacy for Old Abe, probably because fish are a staple of eagles’ diets in the wild.

The 8th Wisconsin soon became known as the Eagle Regiment; once ensconced as a regular unit in Joseph Mower’s brigade, the entire brigade became known as the Eagle Brigade. During a brief stop in St. Louis, the regiment was offered \$500 for the eagle, and again declined. (His fame and value continued to grow, as Allen pointed out.) He also provided many entertainments and distractions while in camp or on the march. Among the escapades Allen listed were: tipping over water pails, attacking clothes lines, getting drunk from a bottle of wine, drinking from an unguarded saucer of peach brandy, and others.

Old Abe saw his first combat at Farmington, Mississippi, in May 1862. At Corinth in October 1862, a bullet severed the eagle’s tether in the midst of combat; he started gliding along the Union line, but his bearer (number 3, David McLain) caught him after fifty feet or so. He had lost a few wing and tail feathers in his brief flight. After the battle, Old Abe had his wings cropped to avoid a repeat performance. The brief flight added to his legend, newspapers reporting such fantasies as Abe soaring to inspire the men, or doing reconnaissance, or carrying messages! (McLain tried to correct the record, to no avail.)

Old Abe continued in service during the Vicksburg campaign, as part of William T. Sherman’s Fifteenth Corps. Sherman and his staff developed a habit of tipping their hats to the eagle when they would pass him, a gesture the men of the 8th loved. During the May 22 assault on the Vicksburg entrenchments, a Rebel shell burst near the colors, taking them (as well as Abe and his bearer) down. Additionally, Abe was hit in the neck with a spent ball. The regiment took cover, and a rabbit was found for the eagle.

After more combat experience, Old Abe was mustered out in September 1862, returning to Madison as a war relic. He was brought to a Sanitary Fair in Chicago in 1865; the Chicago Museum offered \$20,000 for him but was again turned down. His notoriety continued apace with his monetary value. Over time, he would be memorialized on monuments, as part of businesses, and most famously as the patch of the 101st Airborne Division. He died of smoke inhalation after an 1881 Capitol fire; stuffed and mounted for posterity, his remains were destroyed in another fire.

On behalf of the Round Table, I would like to thank Jerry Allen for this enlightening and entertaining look at Old Abe, the Battle Eagle.

Pat McCormick

Our speaker for the October meeting will be our own Bruce Allardice. A summary of his talk and a brief biography follow.

"Loose Lips:" Military Intelligence During the Civil War

In 1862 newspapers reported that US Grant had been killed at Shiloh. And 12 different times newspapers reported that Jefferson Davis has died. In addition to printing "fake news," the newspapers also published a shocking amount of information about army numbers and strategy. As the US's first total war, the Civil War was a learning experience for both the military and the government. One aspect of this was the need for military security. Whereas today intelligence gathering and the need for keeping secrets is a vital part of army doctrine, this was not the case in 1861. Army officers, newspapers, and government officials had to learn that security saves lives. Professor Allardice reviews how one 1861 military movement, Gen. Burnside’s Hatteras expedition, was compromised and almost ruined by the

cavalier attitude of army officers (and others) to security, discussing 1861 security procedures (or lack thereof) in the context of modern military doctrine.

Biography

A professor of history at South Suburban College, **Bruce S. Allardice** is past president of the Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table, and past president of the Civil War Round Table of Chicago. Prof. Allardice has authored or coauthored six books, and numerous articles, on the Civil War. His latest book is Two Years Before the Paddlewheel: Charles F. Gunther, Mississippi River Confederate (State House Press, 2012), the edited diary of Charles F. Gunther, a Confederate steamboat officer who later became Chicago's leading candymaker. Other books include More Generals in Gray (LSU Press 1995) a selection of the History Book Club. He had two books come out in 2008: Confederate Colonels: A Biographical Register (U of MO Press), a biographical register of Confederate army colonels, and Kentuckians in Gray (U Press of KY), co-authored with Professor Larry Hewitt. He authored an essay on General Stephen D. Lee for vol. 3 of Confederate Generals in the Western Theater (U. of TN Press 2011). His article on "John E. Smith and the 96th Illinois" appeared in 2015 in the Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society.

A former Board Member of the Illinois State Historical Society, Prof. Allardice has presented numerous lectures and presentations on the Civil War and genealogy for Civil War Round Tables, museums, and civic organizations. He is the recipient of the CWRT of Chicago's prestigious Nevins-Freeman Award for distinguished service in Civil War Scholarship and the CWRT movement.

An avid sports historian, Prof. Allardice currently heads up 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 19th Century ballplayers. His article on The Rise of Baseball in the South received an award from the Society of American Baseball Research for Best Baseball History article of 2012. Prof. Allardice's groundbreaking work on the early spread of baseball, done at the request of Major League Baseball, can be found at <http://www.protoball.org>, the "pre-pro baseball" link. He's also coauthored two articles on Civil War baseball published in the journal Base Ball. He contributed an essay to Scandal on the South Side: The 1919 Chicago

White Sox (SABR, 2015). He is currently newsletter editor of the SABR Origins of Baseball Newsletter.

Prof. Allardice is a graduate of the University of Illinois and a lifelong resident of the Chicago area.

Speaker lineup:

- 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: Rob Girardi TBA
- Dec.1, 2023 Dave Powell TBA
- Jan.5, 2024: Larry Hewitt Port Hudson
- Feb. 2, 2024: Dennis Doyle TBA
- Mar. 1, 2024: Steve Alban: The Election of 1860
- Apr. 5, 2024: Leslie Goddard TBA
- May 3, 2024: Jon Sebastian TBA
- June 7, 2024: Diana Dretske: The 96th Illinois



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Appointed Positions

Newsletter Editor	Jerry Rodosky gjrodosky@gmail.com 847-420-1639
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Thanks to Charlie Banks for storing our large collection of books which we have sold to a book store in Park Ridge. Due to storage problems, we cannot accept any more books for now.

Upcoming Events

Currently, we are not charging dues for the 2023-2024 year. IT is a good time to recruit new members, young and old !

Join Zoom Meeting on Friday, Oct. 6, 2023, at 7 PM

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81433758155?pwd=S1FqVjJ1WmZsTTd1VlJNRCtLcjJLdz09>

Please include the link to our website: <http://www.northernilcwr.org/>

We will follow up with our monthly discussion information soon.