

# BUGLE CALL ECHOES



Vol. 9, No. 8, August 2001

San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table

*Knowing in part may make a fine tale, but wisdom comes from seeing the whole.*

## **August Program**

Elaine Herman was born in Massachusetts and raised in Monterey, California. She graduated from San Jose State University and later received a nursing degree. Elaine resides in Monterey where she is working as a nurse and raising two boys as a single parent.

Elaine bought an old house in Monterey and while cleaning out some boxes that were left in the basement she discovered a diary. She put it away for several years. Then one evening she thumbed through it and the name Farragut appeared. She realized that she was reading a Civil War diary of a young yeoman in Farragut's fleet.

As the result of that find, Elaine authored *Yeoman in Farragut's Fleet: the Civil War Diary of Josiah Parker Higgens*, which will be the subject of her talk at the August meeting of the San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table.



## **President's Corner**

Work continues on the 2002 West Coast Civil War Round Table Conference. Bill Head has been busy with his contacts and has put together a tentative list of great speakers. At this time the slate includes our friend, Jim Stanbery, Craig Symonds, and Richard McMurray. Ed Bearss is set to serve as our keynote speaker once more. Congratulations, Bill, you have done it again! All of these speakers are among the elite of Civil War historians and authors. Stay tuned for further conference updates.

October is fast approaching and with it comes two of our club's most important events. The first weekend of October is the annual Kearney Park re-enactment. We will have a booth there again this year and will be looking for volunteers to represent the round table. The October meeting is also our annual fund raiser. Mark your calendars now!

*Mike Carter*

## **August 2001 Meeting**

The meeting of the San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table will be held on Thursday, August 30, 2001, at the Ramada Inn, Shaw Avenue and Highway 41 in Fresno.

A no-host social hour will begin at 6 p.m., followed by dinner and the program at 7 p.m.

Please send your check for \$15 (\$10 for students under 25) to cover the cost of the meal to Gloria Carter, PO Box 5695, Fresno, CA 93755, or call 559/322-9474 to advise her you will be attending the meeting.

## **What the Civil War Looked Like**

*by James L. Swan*

*Excerpted from the July 6, 2001, issue of Network Chicago City Talk*

The Civil War was not pretty or quaint, but you'd never know that from looking at most of the art that the war inspired. Photography was too primitive to record scenes of action and battle. The most common type of photograph—the frozen portrait of the well-dressed soldier—revealed nothing about the rotten food, disease, poor medical care, monotonous marches, prisoner of war camps or the terror of facing a volley from 10,000 Confederate muskets.

Photography's limitations left the other visual arts—sketches, woodcuts, engravings, prints and paintings—to bring the realities of war to the home front. But popular prints usually obscured the dark side of the war. Boring scenes of daily camp life and gruesome images of suffering, death and destruction were not fit subjects for the tranquil homes of the North. The public preferred a

sanitized vision of heroes, great generals and dashing charges. Such artworks mythologized and romanticized the war while it was still being fought; today they continue to skew our perceptions.

*[Eye of the Storm: The Civil War Odyssey Written and Illustrated by Private Robert Knox Sneden, edited by Charles F. Bryan, Jr., and Nelson D. Lankford (The Free Press, \$37.50)]* explodes that myth by substituting an unvarnished, gritty portrait of the war through the eyes of one remarkable soldier. Sneden, who trained as an architect, joined the Union Army after war broke out in 1861 and served in the eastern campaigns as a soldier and mapmaker. He was captured in 1863 and sent to the notorious Andersonville prison camp. Sneden survived that hellhole, was paroled and lived until 1918. His story, although dramatic, was not unlike those of many other veterans.

What makes Sneden unique is that he sketched and painted just about everything he saw of the war, thereby creating a visual record of Homeric proportions. Sneden was truly an artist obsessed. He sketched in camp, on the march, at battlefields and even in Andersonville prison, where he hid his art from guards. Between 1861 and 1865, he created hundreds of sketches and watercolors. Even the end of the war could not stop him. When the armies put down their guns in April 1865, Sneden would not lay down his brush. He continued to paint watercolors based on his sketches, and he labored on an illustrated diary that totaled several thousand pages. By the end he had created about 400 watercolors and a massive diary adorned with hundreds of additional artworks.

Fortunately, Sneden painted in a documentary, not romantic, style, capturing the look and feel of life in the Union Army. If a soldier could be transported today in a time tunnel from 1865 to...2001, he would instantly recognize the content of Sneden's paintings.

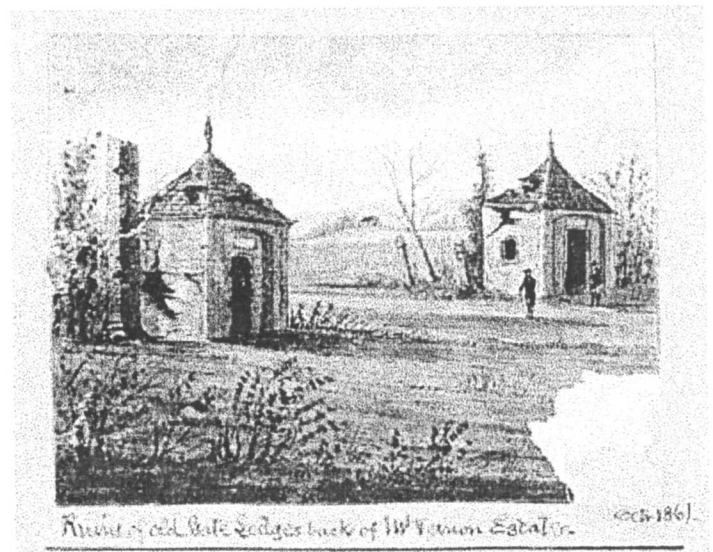
Sneden's documentary approach emphasizes meticulously detailed views of topography, waterways, landscapes, weaponry, battles and architecture. These watercolors suggest his skill as a mapmaker. When Sneden paints soldiers, he usually masses them anonymously in long lines of minute figures with invisible faces, from the perspective of an omniscient eye high above. Richly colored, Sneden's watercolors remain fresh and vivid. Indeed, their attractive folk-art-like quality

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risks distracting viewers from the reality of what they represent. Perhaps that is why Sneden chose not to let his images stand alone. Alone, they are almost too pretty, too pleasing to the eye, to communicate their message. Alone, the pictures might seem part of the misleading genre that mythologized the war. By constructing his own narrative, and by merging art and text, Sneden ensured that his art would not be divorced from its context.

"A surprising number of self-taught artists recorded their impressions of the Civil War, and a truly remarkable number of self-taught writers kept diaries, but few did both, which is what makes the Robert Knox Sneden archive so gripping," says Harold Holzer, vice president of communications at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and co-author of *The Union Image: Popular Prints of the Civil War*. "His words are riveting and his pictures are fresh, charming and vivid. Best of all for me—someone who has spent years searching for original material on what made wartime artists click—Sneden not only drew what he wrote about, he also wrote about what he drew, so this collection puts us inside the war and also inside the mind of a creative force being inspired under stress. Sneden was...an unheralded virtuoso capturing the sights and sounds of a bloody war with irresistible style."

For additional information, visit the Sneden website at [www.sneden.com](http://www.sneden.com). The traveling exhibition of some of his watercolors and drawings will be on display at the Huntington Library in Pasadena from October 23, 2001 – January 27, 2002.



Lodges at Mt. Vernon, 1861, by Sneden  
copyright Virginia Historical Society

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### Recognizing Women's Roles

Throughout our country's history, the stories of American heroines have often failed to reach the masses of people yearning to learn of our nation's history. Since our great Civil War, men who gave their lives on our country's great battlefields have been honored with statues and monuments commemorating heroic events that helped to shape and preserve our nation. There is no greater example of statuary honor than on the fields of Gettysburg, where the greatest battle in our nation's history took place 138 years ago.

As years have passed, most of the events and people at the Gettysburg battlefield have been recognized with a monument designating the sacrifices made on the fields of war. Although the brave men who gave their lives have been recognized throughout the years, the women of Gettysburg have gone unrecognized.

One of the most fascinating stories in Gettysburg's history involves Elizabeth Catherine Maser Thorn. Elizabeth was born in Eigelsdorf, County of Nidta, Germany in 1832. She sailed to America in 1854 and married Peter Thorn, who was hired as the first caretaker of Evergreen Cemetery in 1856. In 1862, Peter joined the Union army, and left Elizabeth in charge of the cemetery. She lived at the gatehouse with her parents, who also emigrated from Germany, and her three sons. After the first day of the three-day Battle of Gettysburg, she was forced to flee her home with her family and returned after the battle ended. Upon her return, she commenced to bury the first 91 soldiers from the battle in the rockiest region of the cemetery while she was 6-months pregnant. Her possessions were stolen during the three-day battle, and she did not have food left at the house upon her return to feed her children. The cemetery and town were unbearable for weeks due to the stench from the dead bodies lying in the fields. Men were ordered to help Elizabeth, but they could not handle the working conditions and left soon after they started digging. She endured the months following the battle and became one of the country's true heroines. I live in the same house that Elizabeth lived in over 140 years ago. I am proud of her accomplishments before, during and after the battle.

We will be recognizing Elizabeth and the women of Gettysburg with a monument honoring the accomplishments of the brave women who served in all capacities before, during and after the Battle of

Gettysburg. The Gettysburg Civil War Women's Memorial will be a 7-foot bronze statue of Elizabeth Thorn and will be placed by the cemetery gatehouse and near the first soldiers buried from the Battle of Gettysburg. This will be one of the few monuments erected in the country honoring women during various wars. Along with the placement of the memorial, we will be rehabilitating the entranceway and walkways leading from the Soldiers Cemetery sidewalk through the archway to the statue. Total cost for the monument and the rehabilitation of the entranceway is \$130,000.

As you can imagine, the Civil War historians often neglect to recognize women's accomplishments during the period. This is our way to help educate natives and visitors to Gettysburg about the accomplishments of these Gettysburg heroines. Although I have done some of the tasks that Elizabeth performed while she was caretaker of the cemetery, I cannot imagine what she endured in those weeks following the battle. What would go through a woman's mind in that situation? The devastation and smell of death around for weeks, while she is wondering how she is going to feed her family. Will her unborn child survive the stress put on her body while she buries someone else's son?

It is hard to imagine what these women endured. It is indeed an honor to serve as the eighth caretaker of this historic cemetery and to serve as president of the Gettysburg Civil War Women's Memorial. We plan on dedicating the monument on November 16, 2002. We know that the monument will raise awareness of women's history at Gettysburg and the history of Evergreen Cemetery. In the future, lot holders and visitors who cherish the cemetery and its history will be more likely to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. Since Gettysburg is visited by people from all over the world, we feel this work of art will surely inspire people to learn more about women's history far beyond the fields of Gettysburg.

Sincerely,

*Brian A. Kennell*

*President, Gettysburg Civil War Women's Memorial  
Evergreen Cemetery Superintendent*

Email: [ever@mail.cvn.net](mailto:ever@mail.cvn.net)

For more information about Elizabeth Thorn, see Mary Kuza's article in the August 2000 issue of *Bugle Call Echoes*.

## PROGRAM SCHEDULE FOR 2001

Date	Speaker	Topic
January 25, 2001	Membership	<i>Share and Tell</i>
February 22, 2001	Don McCue	<i>Forced Into Glory: Lincoln's White Dream</i>
March 29, 2001	Dr. Rebecca Steine	<i>Varina Davis and Mary Todd Lincoln</i>
April 26, 2001	Lee Merideth	<i>Civil War Railroads</i>
May 31, 2001	Panel Discussion: Carter, O'Neal, Ritchey	<i>Causes of War</i>
June 30, 2001 (note date change: Saturday picnic)	Rick Kubiak	<i>The Common Soldier</i>
July 26, 2001	Evan Jones	<i>Tennessee 1864, A Grave or a Free Home?</i>
August 30, 2001	Elaine Herman	<i>Yeoman in Farragut's Fleet</i>
September 27, 2001	Bill Head	<i>Civil War Fiction</i>
October 25, 2001	Annual Fund Raiser: Jim Stanbery	<i>TBA</i>
November 29, 2001	Chuck Baley	<i>An Evening with Dr. Meux</i>
December 9, 2001	Christmas Get Together	

**NOTE: At the end of this year, Carol Berry will be relinquishing her duties as editor of *Bugle Call Echoes*. If you are interested in succeeding her in this job, please call Mike Carter at 559/322-9474.**

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Please begin/renew my membership in the San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table. My membership category is checked below:

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Clip this membership form and send it with your check to the SJVCWRT, PO Box 5695, Fresno, CA 93755. The membership year is from January to December. Five dollars of each membership goes towards preservation.