



## 2nd MINNESOTA BATTERY

# ***“ACTION FRONT”***

Circular No. 193

December 2011

### **On This Date-150 Years Ago**

December 1861

A man by the name of John T. Ford signed a lease for a building on 10th Street in Washington on December 10, 1861. The building was large, though not ornate. It had been built in 1833 by the First Baptist Church and served that congregation until 1859 when the First Baptist Church merged with the Fourth Baptist Church. Since the merger, the building on 10th Street had stood empty.

Ford had great plans for the building. He raised enough capital to turn it into a theatre and called it Ford's Athenaeum and began hosting plays. He also began making plans for. By February, Ford had raised enough money and he closed the theater for renovations. He spent some \$10,000 on improvements in the next month and the theatre re-opened on March 19th, 1862.

Disaster struck when fire gutted the theatre on December 30, 1862. Work began rebuilding it in February of 1863 and by the end of August, the theater reopened, this time called, Ford's New Theatre. Plays began on a regular schedule, but without question, the most famous act in the theatre was not on the main stage. Ford's Theater was where President Lincoln was shot on April 14, 1865. John Wilkes booth became the most famous actor to ever set foot on the stage in Ford's Theatre when he jumped down from the Presidential box where he had just shot Lincoln.

Guards were posted on the Theatre to prevent looting after Lincoln's death. The building was boarded up, bought by the government, used to house records, offices, and more, and neglected until 1932 when it was renovated to become a Lincoln Museum. Upgrades in museum status began with the National Park System taking ownership, one of its first properties. The first play in more than 100 years opened there in 1969 and Ford's Theatre hosts 3-5 plays a year today as well as being an excellent Lincoln museum.

### **Next Meeting**

**December 10, 2:00 or so**

We will have our meeting at the conclusion of the Civil War Christmas event in Anoka. This will be a short meeting—the only topic is the National Event at Shiloh, Tennessee in April of 2012.



### **Upcoming Events**

**December 10, Rum River Library, Anoka**  
**4201 6th Avenue, Anoka, 763-576-4695**  
**Civil War Christmas! 10:30 to 1:30**

Arrive by 9:30 for setting up. The library does not open until 10:00, but thanks to one of our Battery members working at this library, we can get in early! (Thanks, Lisa!)

The Wendel indoor tent will be available for the “camp” part of the room as well as some other usual camp items. Please bring whatever kind of props you can for what you want to do and to make this more “Christmas-y” as that is our theme.

Santa, dressed in red, white and blue, will be joining us about 11:00, so he will help add to the atmosphere. We expect that he will be mostly busy with people wanting photos of their kids with an 1860s Santa.

We will interpret the things soldiers in the field and those at home were doing to celebrate the season. Please be thinking about what you want to do—we want this to be different than the Winter Camp we did last March (we're doing that again in February), so be prepared for an 1860s holiday.

Ideas for soldiers include writing/reading letters, making a gift from camp materials to send home, whittling, decorating a tree from things in camp, planning a camp Christmas dinner for the troops, singing Christmas hymns, opening a box from home, etc.

The home front activity ideas can include some of the same things as the soldiers, as well as packing Christmas boxes, planning/making special foods or clothing, sewing for soldiers or the Sanitary Fairs, making plans to travel to visit family/soldiers, etc.

Other ideas are encouraged! Please let Vickie know what you plan to do so she can coordinate the activities—we don't all want to be doing the same thing!

# ***The Rites of Innocence — Christmas 1861***

By James S. Robbins

An excellent article from the *National Review Online* about Christmas in 1861

The Christmas of 1861 arrived with the nation at war. This was unanticipated; it had been a year and five days since South Carolina had seceded, and ten months since the formation of the Confederate States of America. Many had known that these events would probably lead to war, but few on either side had expected the conflict to endure. It would end quickly, at the first clash of arms. Failing that, over by the end of summer. By the end of fall, surely. Then winter arrived and the war was ongoing, both sides anticipating spring and the renewal of the campaign season.

In general, the mood amongst the southerners was optimistic this Christmas. Their new country had survived the year. Northern armies had made some concerted attacks, but the Confederacy had successfully defended its sovereignty. The *Charleston Mercury* noted that this season “there is anything else than ‘peace on earth and good will to men,’ yet the present situation and the prospect before us afford ample cause for gratitude. We are not perhaps so well off as we might have been, but are intact as a nation, and after many months of war with a people much superior to ourselves in numbers and resources, have proved our ability to maintain our independence.”

In Richmond, President Jefferson Davis and his wife Varina tended to a new addition to their family, William Howell “Billy” Davis, born in the Confederate White House less than three weeks earlier. Christmas time was special to them, since they had met over the holidays in 1843 in Jefferson’s brother’s home. The *Richmond Dispatch* noted that the children were certain that Santa Claus would be able to run the Union blockade, “for he comes by a route over which no Lincolmites has dominion, and where no Yankee ship can sail.” Military gifts were very popular with the children that year, such as wooden swords, pop-guns, and drums. An Augusta, Georgia, paper noted “there were abundance of presents bestowed upon the little ones — and many a family has its pleasant episodes to talk of in after times. All our places of business where gifts could be obtained were crowded on the 24th.... The sales, despite the hard times, were very large.”

The *Richmond Dispatch* noted that some argued that because of the war there should be no celebration that year, but the editors disagreed. “We can pledge the cup of kindness to the boys far away,” they wrote, “who will be all the happier for the good wishes and tender thoughts around the family hearthstone.... It is pleasant, by some word or act, to remind our absent friends that they are not forgotten.” The *Republican* of Marshall, Texas, noted that people felt that “the hour of danger has passed; that there may be difficulties and sacrifices, but that their freedom is secure. And hence, when they survey this broad land, and contemplate its future opulence, have they not reason to rejoice, and look upon the past as a ‘happy Christmas?’”

In the north, the mood was less festive. Celebrations were held in cities and towns as they always had been, but there was an undercurrent of glumness. The early rallying cry of “On to Richmond,” popularized by Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*, was now a subject of parody. Northern arms had not swiftly extinguished the rebellion, as they had expected. In fact, the Union Army could not count a single significant victory. A minor skirmish at Dranesville, Virginia, on December 20, which the Federals won, was much

discussed, its significance exaggerated out of proportion.

“The first Federal victory south of the Potomac,” the papers crowed, and Secretary of War Simon Cameron wrote that “its effects must be to inspire confidence in the belief that hereafter, as heretofore, the cause of our country will triumph.” Closer to the capital, General Heintzleman, perhaps seeking a similar encounter, took his troops on a Christmas excursion down the banks of the Potomac to find some rebels, but the main body of Confederate troops were wintering miles away around Centerville.

Newspapers north and south on December 25 carried front-page coverage of the developing crisis known as the Trent Affair. On November 8, Captain Charles Wilkes of the U. S. S. *San Jacinto* had intercepted the British ship *Trent* in international waters and removed two Confederate legates heading for Europe, James Mason and John Slidell. Public opinion in neutral Britain was outraged; an ultimatum soon arrived demanding an apology and the release of the imprisoned men. President Lincoln instructed Secretary of State William Seward to craft a measured response, with the admonition “one war at a time.” Lincoln’s cabinet debated the issue in a lengthy Christmas Day meeting, finally agreeing to release the Confederates and pay reparations. John Nicolay, one of Lincoln’s secretaries, objected that affairs of state were interfering with holiday plans. “John [Hay] and I are moping the day away here in our offices like a couple of great owls in their holes,” he wrote, “and expect in an hour or two to go down to Willards and get our ‘daily bread’ just as we do on each of the other three hundred and sixty four days of the year.” Later that evening the President hosted a dinner for two dozen guests, though Nicolay and Hay were not among them.

U.S. Patent Office clerk Horatio Nelson Taft had spent Christmas day at home, entertaining not only his own children, but also the president’s. “It has been quite a noisy day about the house,” he wrote in his diary. “Our three boys and the Two Lincoln boys have been very busy firing off Crackers & Pistols. Willie & Thomas Lincoln staid to Dinner at 4 o’clock.” Days later young Willie Lincoln fell ill with typhus; he died in February. Confederate General James Longstreet spent the holiday in Richmond with his family, but soon his three youngest children, Mary Ann, James Jr. and Augustus Baldwin, fell ill with scarlet fever. The sickness stretched into January, and there were some signs of improvement. But on January 25, Mary Ann succumbed; within a week, all three would be dead. It is said that Longstreet never fully recovered from his grief.

Christmas reached the frontlines with a true sense of holiday on both sides. There was little fighting in the east, and most units organized various types of diversions and celebrations. “The officers decided to allow the men to have a grand celebration on Christmas day,” reads the journal of the 1st Rhode Island Light Artillery. “Some turkeys, geese, and a few Maryland rabbits (pigs) had been secured from the neighboring farmers. Quartermaster-sergeant Dyer, by the officers orders, procured a small barrel of beer. Just after retreat roll call the feast, which had been prepared by the cooks was served, after which the barrel of beer was tapped, and the celebration began. At dusk a large bon-fire was lighted to enliven the occasion.”

## ***Rites of Innocence, continued***

A correspondent from the 18th Virginia regiment noted a similar scene among the southern troops: "Christmas Eve was welcomed with hearty demonstrations of joy and gladsome delight; indeed, each man looked upon the other with a manifest air of satisfaction. ... Boxes from our good old homes far away came in the very nick of time, filled to overflowing with all imaginable niceties, thus reminding, us that, distant though we be from those who love us, yet we are subjects of thought and care. It is a most satisfying reflection. ... Each box contained some of the good things we usually get at home at such times — turkey, ham, sausage, spare-rib, butter, eggs, pies, cakes, etc."

In Fayetteville, Virginia, Major and future president Rutherford B. Hayes of the 23rd Ohio regiment noted in his journal, "A beautiful Christmas morning, clear, cool and crisp, bright and lovely." He wrote a letter to his wife, wishing "a merry Christmas to you and the little stranger," his newborn son Joseph Thompson Hayes, then four days old. "At this home-happiness season, I think of you constantly." The regimental band played a concert, and Hayes dined in a sergeant's mess, with "turkey, chickens, pies, pudding, doughnuts, cake, cheese, butter, coffee and milk, all abundant and of good quality. Poor soldiers!" But there were ill feelings in the regiment that day — a sergeant named Haven was raised to Captain rank over the heads of many Lieutenants. Another promotion from the ranks was being considered for 18-year-old Sergeant McKinley. But the Haven promotion so soured the mood that the action was deferred. Only after his bravery at the Battle of Antietam nine months later was future president William McKinley given his commission, at Hayes' recommendation.

The excitement of the war's outbreak had brought thousands of volunteers, who enlisted for three to six months, a term which they may have presumed to be the duration. Many enlistments expired in December, and for these men the war was over, unless they chose to stay. Many did not. Confederate Captain and surgeon John Wyatt's term ended the day after Christmas, which found him in Missouri. "Spent last night & today at my friend Layton's near town," he wrote in his diary. "Had a real old Virginia Egg Nogg & drummer, and had pounds and had a agreeable time. Our Regt. is disbanded today, consequently I am foot loose. I leave with the men in a day or two South East, but I cannot promise myself the pleasure of getting home this winter." Brigadier General M. Jeff Thompson, the local commander in New Madrid, wrote that "Nearly all my men are disbanded and comparatively but few have re-enlisted. They seemed determined to take the Christmas holidays to themselves and are having a real noisy time of it." As a stratagem to get men to re-enlist General Thompson moved each regiment as close to their homes as possible, in hopes they would take a short Christmas holiday and then return to the colors. "How many of these will volunteer it is impossible to tell," he wrote, "but I am sure I will have but a skeleton force until February or March."

However, others were eager to get into the fight. W.H. Flint, of the 2nd Vermont Light Artillery, left his home on Christmas Day to head for the front. "My father was in Brandon to see me off again for the War," he wrote. "He said that he should never see me again. I was inclined to be light hearted about it but still I had some misgivings as three years is a long time and the war was growing fiercer than ever." In fact, Flint served for four years and three months,

but he made it back home. George E. MacDonald was four years old that same day when he watched his father Henry, of the 6th New Hampshire Volunteers, board a train in Keene. "In his blue overcoat with a cape to it, father looked the ideal soldier," George later recalled. Henry MacDonald served honorably in the regiment, and in August 1862 fell in the Second Battle of Bull Run, shot through the head.

Elsewhere the war continued. In the Oklahoma Territory, Christmas found Confederate Colonel James M. McIntosh, last of his West Point class of 1849, leading elements of five Arkansas and Texas cavalry regiments towards a position occupied by a force of pro-Union Indians led by Creek Chief Opothleyahola. The Indians had dug in on a steep rocky hill covered with oak trees. The next day McIntosh advanced on the Indians, who shouted defiance at the men approaching them, and opened fire when they were within range. McIntosh threw out flanking forces, with orders to dismount when they were in position. His next move, with enemy fire still raking his command, was related by trooper A.W. Sparks: "The impetuous McIntosh, who cannot brook a tardy skirmish salutation, orders the charge."

"It seemed a desperate undertaking to charge a position which appeared almost inaccessible," McIntosh wrote later, "but the order to charge to the top of the hill met a responsive feeling from each gallant heart in the line, and at noon the charge was sounded, one wild yell from a thousand throats burst upon the air, and the living mass hurled itself upon the foe." McIntosh led the assault as the hillside erupted with defensive fire. The engagement quickly turned into a series of small, hand to hand skirmishes. The Confederates pushed back the enemy before them, muscling their way upwards towards the summit, dispatching warriors as they went with shot, sword and bayonet. Opothleyahola's men were routed, and fled towards Kansas into the teeth of an approaching blizzard, hunted by pro-southern Cherokee cavalry. For his victory, McIntosh was promoted to Brigadier General.

At Fort Pulaski, Georgia, Confederate defenders faced a developing Union siege. But the people of Savannah had sent many boxes of foods, and the troops wanted for nothing. "Fine day here," wrote Private John Hart of the Irish Jasper Greens. "Plenty of fighting and whisky drinking." Meanwhile the Union troops encamped on Hilton Head Island, spent most of their Christmas digging trenches, but were given some time off in honor of the day. Private Charles Lafferty, of the 48th New York, wrote his sister, "We had a merry Christmas down hear. We bought sassiges ... and hoe cake and build a fir and cooked our sassiages. That is the way we spent our Christmas." Confederate General Robert E. Lee, who had been sent to see to the coastal defenses, was inland at his headquarters at Coosawatchie, South Carolina. "I cannot let this day of graceful rejoicing pass without some communication with you," he wrote his wife Mary. "I am thankful for the many among the past that I have passed with you, and the remembrance of them fills me with pleasure. For those on which we have been separated we must not repine. Now we must be content with the many blessings we receive." He bemoaned the confiscation of their home in Arlington, and the relics it contained, many from George Washington's family home at Mt. Vernon. But, he wrote, "they cannot take away the remembrance of the spot, and the memories of those that to us rendered it sacred. That will remain to us as long as life will last, and that we can preserve."

# **Battery Profile**

## **Samuel F. Woods**

Joining the Second Battery was probably an easy choice for Samuel. He most likely knew the lieutenant doing the recruiting, Albert Woodbury, since Samuel did a little lumbering and Woodbury's family had the saw mills on the Rum River. It was also the unit his friend, William Staples, had joined just two weeks earlier. Samuel and William were neighbors, both having come to Minnesota from Maine with their parents to settle in Grow Township, Anoka County, Minnesota, in the early 1850's. Both men were engaged in farming with their fathers, both did a little lumbering on the side.

Samuel was born on May 29, 1838, in Waldo, Maine. In 1862, he married Lucy Tilton in Anoka. It was also the year he enlisted, mustering into the Battery on September 8th. He was paid a \$25 bounty for his three year commitment. Samuel had black eyes, black hair, dark complexion, and stood 5' 6" tall. His middle initial probably stood for Frank as that was the name he often went by, especially after the war.

Samuel saw the first battles with the Battery before he was sent to the hospital for diarrhea on June 20, 1863. He stayed there, struggling with illness, until January 23, 1864, reporting for duty only once for a single day before he was sent back to the hospital. In January of 1864, his diagnosis was changed to rheumatism and that kept him away from duty until May when they changed his diagnosis again. This time, Samuel had bronchitis and "valv. disease of heart." Somehow despite that, Samuel did report back for duty with the Battery in the fall of 1864. He was with the Battery when it was time for those with over two years of service to reenlist if they chose. Samuel did reenlist and continued to serve in the Battery. His health must have improved as he was not sent to the hospital or noted as sick in the Battery's records throughout the rest of the war.

He was injured, however, in an accident when the Battery was being moved by train near Loudon, Tennessee. Samuel was riding on top of a box car when the train cars derailed. He was thrown from the car down a "steep hill, and both his ankles dislocated, and his back injured." The injured men were placed in a makeshift hospital in a building near the Battery's camp. They had no surgeon, so several of the men helped care for the injured and sick while the Battery was in camp near Loudon.

Samuel went home with the Battery and was mustered out on August 16, 1865.

Part of the enlistment benefits to soldiers came in the form of the 1864 Homestead Act amendment. The amount of time they served in the army could be deducted from their time in proving up a homestead. Samuel took advantage of this and claimed land in Sherburne County, Minnesota. He and Lucy moved there in 1867. They had three children before Lucy died in 1869. Samuel took Lucy back to Grow Township to be buried in the Staples family cemetery on the farm of his friend, William Staples.

Samuel sold the farm in Sherburne County after five years and moved a little further north to Princeton, Minnesota. He alternated between living in Princeton and in Everett, Washington. In 1891, Samuel applied for a pension due to his age and the injuries from the train wreck. It was granted and he was required to inform the Pension Department where he was living and when he moved from one place to the other.

In 1904, Samuel was elected to an officer's position in Princeton's Wallace T. Rines G.A.R. Post 142. He was a member of the post until his death on October 13, 1909. The Post conducted his funeral at the Methodist Church and Samuel was laid to rest in the Oak Knoll Cemetery in Princeton, a veteran's marker on his grave.



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### ***Rites of Innocence, concluded***

General Lee warned Mary that they were in for a long war — that they should not hope for help from the British or anyone else. "We must make up our minds to fight our battles and win our independence alone," he wrote. "No one will help us. We require no extraneous aid, if true to ourselves. But we must be patient. It is not a light achievement and cannot be accomplished at once." The far-sighted Lee could not have known just how long the war would endure, or what

sacrifices were yet to be made. Indeed the first year of war would look inconsequential compared to what was to come. Few wars end as they were intended at their start. By Christmas 1861, one could no longer accept the idea that the contest between north and south would be a brief, painless, and chivalrous struggle. The feasts, the merrymaking, at home and at the front, these were the final rites of innocence. In the new year there would be deadly work to be done.



# Recap



## November 11, Veteran's Day, Winona, MN

11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month marked the start of the ceremonies in Veteran's Park in Winona. Bugler Bill played *To The Colors* as the Winona Veteran's Posts raised the flag.

A hardy gun crew of eight fired three honor volleys over Lake Winona. The echo bouncing back off the bluffs was amazing! As was the weather. It was clear, a bit cool, but sunny and beautiful.

After a very nice ceremony and several special speakers, the ceremony concluded and the gun crew was interviewed by several news agencies before they fell in on the gun to fire another seven rounds. This allowed each member of the gun crew to pull the lanyard to fire a round in honor of all veterans on Veterans Day.

The extra shots also allowed Mrs. Wendel to get some extra photos and even some video of the gun and the echo that came back. These have been posted on Facebook on the Battery's page, so if you have not seen them, you can go to <https://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Second-Minnesota-Battery-of-Light-Artillery-Reenactors/371220336239> to find the videos and more photos. This page is set as a public page, so even if you are not a member

of Facebook you can still view it.

After the event, Battery members all invaded the local Perkins for lunch and had a good time visiting with each other while gathering some odd looks from wait staff and other Perkins patrons!

Despite the interviews, very little appeared on the TV or in the Winona papers beyond one photo and a caption. The best publicity came from the comments from people at the event and how much they appreciated hearing the "big gun" fire honor volleys for veterans.



***The Second Minnesota Light Artillery Battery is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of Civil War history by living it.***

***Membership is \$12 per year. Non-member newsletter subscription rate is \$6.00 per year.***

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