



2nd MINNESOTA BATTERY

“ACTION FRONT”

Circular No. 334

October & November 2025

On This Date-160 Years Ago

With the war over and the era of Reconstruction beginning, the *On This Date* has little to report, so a little Halloween ca 1865, seemed in order!

The image below appeared in *Harper's Weekly Magazine* on October 26, 1861. It was titled “Jeff Davis reaping the harvest.” The original is in the Library of Congress.



Upcoming Events

November 11, Veterans Day, Winona, MN

This annual recognition in a beautiful park on the lake shore includes a salute from our gun at the conclusion of the ceremonies. We will once again provide a gun crew for the day. Rain/snow will NOT preclude our participation! If hauling the gun is anticipated to be a hazard, the gun will travel to Winona BEFORE the snow arrives and be stored there until after the event and the roads are clear. Those attending should arrive at the park by 10:30 to unload the gun and be ready for the program that starts at 11:11 am.

Events for 2018

Please begin gathering information on events that we may want to consider for the 2025 reenacting season. A list of these potential events will be compiled and discussed starting in February with a final vote on the 2025 calendar in March.

Combined Newsletter

Please note that this is the October AND November newsletter. Your editor will have some scheduling conflicts with getting the November newsletter out in a timely manner, so this newsletter covers two months. Good thing we are rolling into a quieter time in our schedule!

Next Meeting

October 25, 11:00, Goodhue County Historical Society 1166 Oak Street, Red Wing

Contact Ken Cunningham with questions or agenda items. 651-388-2945.



Battery Profiles

This month is a “two-fer” as these men did not leave records behind for us to find them. Should anyone know anything more, please tell Vickie or Brian!

Ashel V. Caswell

Ashel was living and working on a farm in La Crescent, Winona County, Minnesota, with a number of others in his household according to the 1860 census. This census does not provide relationships and the members of Ashel's household leave many questions. Ashel is the head of the house, age 20. Mary, possibly his wife, is 19, also born in Canada. There are four children ages 13, 9, 5 and 2. The first three were born in Illinois, the last, possibly Ashel and Mary's daughter, was born in Minnesota. All share the last name of Caswell.

The census shows Ashel owned his property with a taxable value of \$150. He had another \$75 of taxable value in personal property. He was not moved to be one of those eager to enlist and remained on his farm until the draft rendezvous of the late summer in 1864. La Crescent is right on the border with Houston County, a county that was heavily recruited during that draft.

Ashel enlisted as a private in the Second Minnesota Battery on September 2, 1864. His descriptive roll said he was born in Canada, was 25 years old, stood 5' 7" tall with brown eyes, dark hair and complexion. He agreed to serve one year and was given a bounty of \$100, \$33.33 of which he was paid right away. Though the family lived in La Crescent, Ashel's enlistment was in New Hartford and credited to Houston County.

Little is known of Ashel's life as no records tell of his discharge. The next record is the 1870 census where Ashel and Mary are living in Pleasant Mound, Blue Earth County, Minnesota. Two children are listed in the household, one at 3 years old, one at 9/12ths.

The 1880 census lists an Ashel Caswell, but few details match with the life of the man who served in the Battery. If this is the man from the Battery, he was in Otter Tail County, Minnesota, but it seems unlikely.

It is the last reference found for Ashel.

William Blake

Not much is known about William as he seemed disinclined to leave many records about his life behind. In 1860, he was living in Saratoga Township, Winona County, Minnesota, with a doctor named J.C. Dickson and a young woman by the name of Maria Blake, age 17. It is not clear if she was William's daughter or his wife. The home they were living in may have been William's as his real estate value in the census was \$400.

William decided to enlist in the Second Minnesota Battery and went to Fort Snelling in December of 1861. He signed his enlistment papers on January 1, 1862. The Battery was just getting organized and William was one of the early recruits. The descriptive roll said he was born in Grand Isle County, Vermont, was 52 years old, stood 5' 4-3/4" tall, with a light complexion, blue eyes, and light hair. His occupation was farmer. William was recruited by Richard Dawley, a well-known Mexican War veteran from Winona County who was recruiting for the Second Battery. Dawley became a lieutenant in the Battery for his efforts to fill its ranks.

William's age may have worked against him as at 52, he was double the age of the average recruit in the Battery. On September 30, 1862, he received a disability discharge. The examining surgeon described the problems as “general debility which was first caused from a severe attack of Typhoid Fever which he had during the month of June, and since that time he has suffered from Chronic Diarrhea which has resisted all treatment.”

It is believed William went home to Winona County, but it is not known with certainty. No further trace of his life has been found.

A Pair of Famous Guns

Submitted by Daryl Duden

The two most famous, and by far, the largest Confederate cannon at Columbus, Kentucky, were the "Lady Polk" and the "Belmont", 6.4 inch Anderson rifled Columbiads made at the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia. Both were cast solid in the molds of huge Model 1861 10-inch smoothbore Columbiad cannons, but bored and rifled as 6.4-inchers. The 10" Columbiad design was chosen with expectations that the thick walls of the barrel would provide sufficient strength for the guns to fire rifled projectiles. Both guns were a little over ten feet long, and weighed nearly 15,000 pounds each. Their solid iron rifle bolts were known to weigh up to 128 pounds each.

ARTILLERY PROFILE

- **Model:** 6.4-inch Anderson Rifles
- **Type:** Rifled Columbiads
- **In Service With:** Keiter's Tennessee Light Artillery Battery, CSA
- **Under the Command of:** Captain William Keiter
- **Named Guns:** "Lady Polk", and "Belmont" (a.k.a. the "Lady Davis")
- **Current Disposition:** Melted down in 1942 as part of a scrap metal drive for World War II
- **Misidentification:**
 - In some references, these guns are mistakenly referred to as a Dahlgrens, or Whitworth Rifles.
 - After the bursting of "Lady Polk", union forces mistakenly identified the "Belmont" gun as "Lady Davis"

Some Confederate references call these cannons: Heavy 32-pdr. Rifles, based on the 6.4" bore size being commonly called 32-pdr., based on the equivalent weight round ball of the same caliber.

MANUFACTURING

- **Casting Foundry:** Tredegar Iron Works, Richmond, Virginia
- **Casting Mold:** Model 1861 10-inch Smoothbore Columbiad
- **Tube Composition:** Cast Iron
- **Manufacturing Process:** Traditionally solid Cast Iron, bored, and rifled Columbiad
 - The manufacture of a smaller bore, with extra thick cast iron barrel walls of the 10" Columbiad design, was believed to make these guns strong, and safe enough for use as a rifled cannon. The rifling system was a design of Joseph Reid Anderson, industrial engineer and owner of Tredegar Iron Works.

Year of Manufacture: 1861

WEIGHTS & MEASURES

- **Bore:** 6.4-inch Rifle
- **Rifling Type:** 5 equal lands & grooves
- **Tube Length:** over 10 feet long
- **Tube Maximum Outer Diameter:** 32 inches
- **Tube Weight:** nearly 15,000 pounds

AMMUNITION

Projectiles: 128 lb. Solid Iron Rifle Shot



Recap

Sept 13-14 Mason City, Iowa

During the weekend of September 13-14, members of the 2nd Minnesota Battery travelled to East Park in Mason City, IA for their 33rd annual Civil War Weekend. This year the reenactment was based on the Battle of Belmont, MO. It had been 20 years since we last travelled to Mason City and the changes in East Park were quite dramatic. It has become more "family friendly" with additional pavilions and new picnic shelters, lots of playground equipment, walking paths and parking areas.

All the reenactor camps were on the north side of the park in the area of the band shell. Although no one was sleeping in the camp, our camp consisted of two flys and four A tents. We were able to park in the street just behind our

row of tents. Camped next to us were the men and women of the New Ulm Battery with their 3-inch Ordnance Rifle and limber. We parked our 10 pdr Parrott with limber adjacent to their gun. Our two cannons represented the Union Army during the battle reenactments. Both days gun drill was conducted in camp.

At 12:30pm, we towed our guns to the south end of the park near the river, the area we camped in during prior visits for the 1:00pm battles. The battlefield was a football field size area between the creek and the former tennis courts, now a basketball court. During the 45-minute battle on Saturday, we were able to load and fire seven times. During the similar length Sunday battle, we had two misfires and only fired five times. We were informed we could pack up immediately following the Sunday battle and we happily obliged.

Battery members who travelled to Mason City, IA, were Bruce Arnoldy, Mardelle Arnoldy, Neil Bruce, John Cain, Daryl Duden, Cameron Larson, Becca Larson, James Livingstone, Mikaela Livingstone, Michael Ritchie, Thomas Schmit and Linnea Schmit. Vince (Harley) and Teresa (Patience) Bergdale were in camp with the New Ulm Battery. Respectfully submitted, Pvt Duden



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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It was great to see Cameron in camp again—and he brought his wife, Becca! We were able to find some loaner clothing to get her—willingly—in period clothing!

