

Issue 37: May 2023

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First Minnesota Monument at Gettysburg

MEMBER PROFILE OF THE MONTH

DENNIS GAROUTTE

BY LANA BLUMHOEFER



Our featured member is Dennis Garoutte. His Civil War interest began with a quote most recently shared by Ron Chernow in his 2017 book, *Grant*: “*Then came an immortal line that would be emblazoned in the press and trail him forever: ‘[I] propose to fight it out on this line if it takes me all summer.’* In an

artful piece of editing, Grant struck out the word ‘me’ which might have sounded vain; that deletion turned him into an impersonal force of nature. Grant didn’t realize the force of his line until it shouted from newspaper headlines several days later. Nothing since the ‘unconditional surrender’ line at Fort Donelson had gripped the public imagination quite so powerfully.”

That line “gripped my personal imagination” as a seventh-grade history student and my interest in the Civil War began there. My interest was accelerated upon my inheritance of a small Civil War library, (probably 40+ books), along with enough time in retirement to begin reading them.

I grew up on a farm within the limits of what was then legislatively defined as the Village of Wilder, Minnesota. Our family farm was the original site of the Breck School which is now located in Golden Valley. The Breck facility abandoned its Wilder campus sometime around 1915 and the original Breck School Chapel in Wilder was repurposed to become a barn. Our family's five cows were milked twice a day in that converted chapel.

In 1966 I volunteered for the draft. After basic training and the completion of military police training at Fort Gordon, Georgia, I was sent to West Germany as a security guard at a NATO weapons depot within the Black Forest.

In 2014 I discovered the TCCWRT due to my existing membership in the Friends of Gettysburg Foundation and I became a TCCWRT member shortly thereafter.

I have visited Wilson's Creek, Gettysburg, Fort Sumter, Antietam, and the Hunley Submarine Museum in Charleston. My last Gettysburg visit included, among other things, viewing the refurbished Cyclorama, a tour of the David Wills house, and a tour of the Jennie Wade house. Those were followed the next day by a self-guided auto tour using a CD. The CD jacket stated the tour time to be about four hours. To the slight irritation of my wife, I/we spent the entire eight-hour day touring the battlefield, [my wife, Kathy, had envisioned spending a few afternoon hours enjoying retail therapy, aka shopping]. I realized we had bypassed the statue of General John Buford, so the next day we viewed the Buford monument before leaving for home.

My soon-to-be great grandmother became a widow during the siege of Vicksburg. Her husband, William A. West, was a member of Iowa's 17th infantry regiment. The 17th was one of the units ordered to immediately advance into the crater/opening in the Rebel line that was caused by the detonation of underground explosives. Private West was mortally wounded during that charge and succumbed twelve days later. His widow, my great grandmother, (Mary Ann King West), married my great grandfather shortly after the war. So my favorite Civil War site is one I have yet to see: Vicksburg.

To me the most interesting parts of the Civil War are the people issues. There is a story of a Federal soldier taken prisoner by the rebels and after many months in a POW Camp he was exchanged. Upon returning to his original unit, his mess mates accompanied him to a nearby creek for a bath. They soon discovered that something was amiss with the skin on his torso. However, it was not a problem with his skin as further scrubbing revealed a shirt adhered to his skin. The soldier's response to this discovery was something to the effect, "Oh, my gosh, I thought that I had lost that shirt months ago." The remnants of the shirt were removed and floated away with the current.

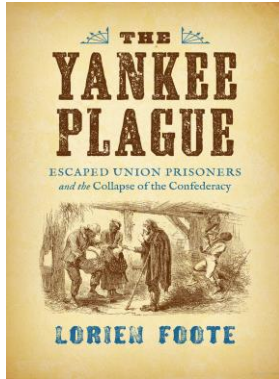
My largest disappointment in the study of the Civil War is negative judgments of the folks that lived half past the 19th century by people using 21st century values as a basis for their criticism of those folks.

Also, I think we sometimes become enthralled with the mystic of far distant Civil War sites to the detriment of interesting displays much closer to us. I think such a display is the GAR Hall in Litchfield, Minnesota. I was told that it is one of only three remaining pristine GAR Halls in the country and it, along with the collection of artifacts on display there, is I believe to be one of Minnesota's GEMS.

OUR MAY MEETING: MAY 16, 2023

“The Yankee Plague: Escaped Union Prisoners and the Collapse of the Confederacy”

Lorien Foote



During the last winter of the Civil War, nearly 3,000 Union prisoners escaped from Confederate prisons in the Carolinas and fled toward Union army lines. Black and white southerners fed, hid, and guided the fugitives across hundreds of miles of dangerous terrain. Lorien Foote will share what the journey of escaped prisoners reveals about the transformation of the home front to a battle front inside the Confederacy and how the movement of prisoners of war ultimately shaped the contours of the war’s final military campaigns.



*Lorien Foote is the Patricia & Bookman Peters Professor in History at Texas A&M University. She is the author of four books, editor of three volumes, and writer of numerous articles and essays on the cultural, intellectual, and military history of the American Civil War. Her books include the just-published *Rites of Retaliation: Civilization, Soldiers, and Campaigns in the American Civil War* (2020); *The Yankee Plague: Escaped Union Prisoners and the Collapse of the Confederacy* (2016), which was a 2017 Choice Outstanding Academic Title; and *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Manhood, Honor, and Violence in the Union Army* (2010), which was a finalist and Honorable Mention for the 2011 Lincoln Prize. She is the co-editor, with Earl J. Hess, of *The Oxford Handbook of the American Civil War*. She is the creator and principal investigator of a digital humanities project, which is mapping the escape and movement of 3000 Federal prisoners of war. The project includes contributions from undergraduate researchers at four universities. It can be explored online at www.ehistory.org/projects/fugitive-federals.html.*

TCCWRT MEMBERS WITH MAY BIRTHDAYS

5/4 - David Haas

5/5 - Jerald Carveth

5/6 - Mark Pridgeon

5/26 - Jay Swanson and Deb Bachrach

5/28 - Jerry Geis

STEVEN SCHIER'S CIVIL WAR TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

What famous American writer briefly served in the Confederate army?

(See last page for the answer)

THIS MONTH IN CIVIL WAR HISTORY – MAY

- 2nd 1865 – President Johnson offers a \$100,000 reward for the capture of Jefferson Davis.
- 3rd 1861 – President Lincoln calls for three-year volunteers to join the Union army.
- 5th 1862 - Battle of Williamsburg, Virginia
- 10th 1865 – U.S. troops capture Confederate President Jefferson Davis at Irwinville, Georgia.
- 12th 1863 – U.S. Grant lead Union forces against Gen. John C. Pemberton's Confederates at the Battle of Raymond, Mississippi.
- 13th 1861 – Baltimore, Maryland occupied by Union troops.
- 28th 1864 – Battle of Dallas Georgia. Part of the Atlanta Campaign.

CIVIL WAR BIRTHDAYS – MAY

- 10th 1813 – Montgomery Blair , U.S. Postmaster General 1861-1864
- 12th 1836 – Lieutenant Commander, John Sanford Barnes, U.S. Navy
- 16th 1801 – William H. Seward, U.S. Secretary of State, 1861-1869
- 18th 1829 – Lieutenant Commander, Daniel L. Braine, U.S. Navy
- 24th 1811 – Brig. General Charles Clark C.S.

STATE CAPITAL TOUR BY BRETT JOHNSON:

14 Members of the Twin Cities Civil War Round Table had a fascinating 2 ½ hour tour (hour longer than planned) of the state capitol Tuesday evening April 25th, under the lead historic site manager Brian Pease.



Tour guide Brian Pease explaining the process of displaying the civil war flags in special cases. Only recently have they placed them up vertically on Boards. Many were severely tattered but painstakingly 'woven' together. They swap different flags through the display cases periodically.



TCCWRT Group photo



Breathtaking Evening view of the gilded quadriga sculpture on top of the capitol building. Architect Cass Gilbert commissioned two people to create the Chariot with a driver and 2nd women holding the 4 chariot horses. The multi-ton sculpture was lifted from the back of the Capitol over the top to be replaced in its position over the front door during renovation.



The 1st MN battle flagpole used at Gettysburg. The 9-foot pole was broken. But a captured 28th VA pole section was spliced into the bottom part. Virginia has been unsuccessful in retrieving its flag (not currently displayed) held by the MN Historical Society.



Brian Pease talking about the Battle of Nashville (left) at Shy's Hill, where the MN 5th, 7th, 9th, and 10th participated, helping to rout CSA General Hood's remaining troops.

There is a sculpture of MN civil war General Shields (not pictured) in one of the corridors. He is noteworthy as the person that Lincoln dueled with in 1842. An Illinois official at the time, Shields did not take kindly to criticism that was leveled against him anonymously, and upon discovering that Lincoln (some think it was his wife) was behind it, challenged Lincoln to a duel to settle scores. Lincoln chose the sword as the weapon of choice, thinking his size would give him an advantage. At the last moment, it was called off, fortunately. Lincoln had hoped to bury the story. Shields is the only person to be a senator from 3 states (MN, IL, MO). He also won the Battle of Kernstown in 1862 against Stonewall Jackson. Over 1/2 of the first 15 governors from MN were civil war veterans. Many of them, along with other Civil War vets, greatly influenced the artwork in the 1905 capitol building (the 3rd State Capitol building) that we see today, resulting in many large Civil War paintings being commissioned.

From the Dusty Collection #29: *Minnesota's Pint-Sized Patriot*

Most Union Army recruits were eager if rough edged candidates for a uniform and training by equally inexperienced officers. But those volunteer officers were sometimes



frustrated by a man – or youngster – they could simply do nothing with. Such a case was Bennett Benson, well known thanks to a much-published tintype in the Minnesota Historical Society collections. The image was probably taken at Fort Snelling in the summer of 1862 shortly after Bennett, age thirteen years, four months and twenty-one days enlisted as a musician in the Sixth Regiment Minnesota Volunteer Infantry. Mustered in on July 18, 1862, he was one of the Sixth Regiment's very first recruits and probably appeared in uniform at St. Paul Mayor John Prince's huge recruiting rally a week later.

Drummer Benson's uniform follows Federal regulation for an infantry musician, but appears to be custom tailored, as was his cap. Standing only four feet nine inches tall, young Bennett was far too small for the army's smallest number one suit of the four sizes issued.

That summer President Lincoln issued two calls each for 300,000 men; Minnesota's quota included the Sixth through Tenth Regiments of Infantry. But enlistments were slow. The Sixth did not fill until mid-August, and only after news arrived of Dakota attacks on the Upper Sioux

Agency were its field officers appointed by the governor. Young Bennet Benson was initially assigned to Company F and probably accompanied their hurried departure by steamer to Shakopee and then by foot to St. Peter and eventually Fort Ridgely. There the inexperienced army under Minnesota Militia Colonel Henry Hastings Sibley organized, drilled, and waited for supplies and ammunition. Bennett was transferred to Captain Hiram Grant's Company A just two days before they left the rest of the army as part of an ill-fated burial party surprised and decimated at Birch Coulee by Dakota warriors. But there is no evidence that Musician Benson was with that company or even at Fort Ridgely on his August 29, 1862, transfer date.

Bennett Benson was born in Norway in 1849 and appears in the Minnesota 1857 Territorial Census as an eight-year-old living in St. Paul. His presumed parents, identified only as J. Benson, age 42 and a saloonkeeper, and C. Benson, female aged 49, are recorded as a different household. Bennett is listed in a household with 40-year-old G. Gundalie, female, 23-

year-old John and 14-year-old Laura Oleson, and L. Monson, a 20-year-old Swedish girl. Perhaps all worked in Benson's saloon. In 1860 John Benson is listed as a carpenter with wife Christen, the three Olsons, probably Christen's children from an earlier marriage, and 11-year-old Bennett, then attending school and strangely enumerated as a female. To enlist in 1862 Bennett had to have had a parent or guardian's permission. Based on later letters copied into the Sixth Infantry's Regimental Order book, those parents may have been happy to see him go!

With the defeat of Dakota hostiles led by Little Crow at the Battle of Wood Lake, the Sixth Minnesota Infantry returned to Fort Snelling. On February 27, 1863, Colonel William Crooks, reluctantly acting *in loco parentis*, appealed for help to Brigadier General Henry Hastings Sibley's District of Minnesota headquarters. Most of his regiment was at that time guarding the Dakota Indian internment camp below Fort Snelling.

*Bennett Benson, a drummer, was enlisted in this regiment. He is thirteen years of age, and perfectly useless. He has no ear for music and is physically unable to do duty. I wish to rid the regiment of him, and respectfully request that you indicate the mode by which the result can be obtained. Can he be discharged on surgeon's certificate? I believe he can.*¹

Regimental surgeons like James McMasters of the Sixth (right) examined injured or sick men to determine their suitability for active service, an important part of the winnowing out process before a unit took to the field. Sick men might be hospitalized. More likely they were sent home on a convalescent furlough and there examined at regular intervals by a local physician who was required to submit paperwork to the regimental surgeon. If recovery was doubtful the veteran could be discharged on surgeon's certificate of disability. These discharges became more



common as the war progressed; the significant underreporting of military service-related deaths at home is being used by modern historians to upwardly adjust the Civil War's already staggering traditional casualty statistics. But Benson was a special case since he was not injured, was not sick, and had been legally enlisted and mustered into federal service.



Colonel Crooks heard nothing from St. Paul and so wrote to General Sibley's talented Assistant Adjutant General Rollin Olin (left) a week later.

[He] is totally unfit for duty as a drummer. He is too small and too young to endure the fatigue of a campaign and has no capability for learning

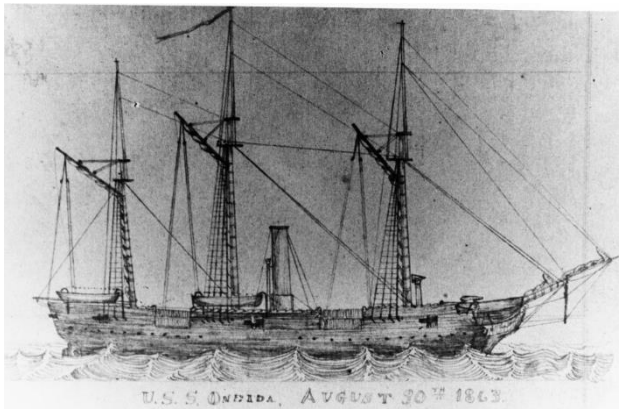
¹ Lieutenant Colonel Crooks to Rollin Olin dated 27 February 1863, Order Book, Sixth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, National Archives and Records Administration.

*music. I have examined his case, and on reflection I doubt if he can be discharged on Surgeon's certificate. Can he not be mustered out of the service directly?*²

The wheels of military administration moved ever so slowly, but finally on April 17, 1863, Musician Bennett Benson was discharged on a surgeon's certificate of disability. But Benson's patriotism – or search for a home – did not end there. Many years later he applied for a government pension and reported that he had next enlisted in the cavalry but did not serve long there.

Finally, he tried the United States Navy and that enlistment stuck. The Navy had a long tradition of signing up youngsters to serve as various types of orderlies or as *powder monkeys* to run bags of gunpowder from ship-board magazine to cannons. Bennett Benson, now a 14-year-old veteran, enlisted on December 4, 1863, and after some brief training was ordered aboard the three masted Sloop of War *Oneida*, built in 1861 and part of the West Gulf Squadron. The Union Navy's major task was enforcing the tight blockade of southern ports, and an essential feature of General Winfield Scott's so called Anaconda Plan to squeeze the south into surrender.

Benson's ship was with Admiral David Farragut's fleet that ran past the underwater torpedoes to enter Mobile Bay on August 5, 1864. Seaman Bennett may not have realized that the land force that Farragut's fleet supported at



Mobile Bay included his old regiment, The Sixth Minnesota Infantry. We can only hope that the naval officers in charge of this pint-sized patriot had better luck than Colonel Crooks back at Fort Snelling. They must have, for the still teenaged veteran was honorably discharged in 1865 and headed back home. The proud young sailor again posed for a photograph to document his service during the Great Rebellion.

The USS Oneida was not so lucky. Never a particularly well equipped or comfortable ship, it ended up at the bottom of Yokohama Harbor in 1870 along with 125 of its crew after having been struck at night by a much larger British merchant vessel.

² Ibid. dated 8 March 1863.



Just two years after his discharge, 18-year-old civilian Bennett Benson was gainfully employed as a messenger in the Minnesota Senate and posed for the third photograph in the Society's collections. But Bennett continued the life of a rascal as he left his eventful teen years. He married a young wife in Minneapolis, but later abandoned her and their children to wander west to Montana. She later sued for his military pension and he apparently never returned to Minnesota.



Bennett was working as a California photographer in 1898 when the United States went to war against Spain in Cuba and the Philippines. He immediately enlisted in the Second Regiment of United States Engineers and served as their official photographer while on campaign in Cuba. He posted for this jaunty portrait on the island. One can only wonder if he gave his officers as much trouble in 1898 as he had in 1862!

Bennett Benson passed away in 1917 in the California Soldier Home, usually a home or hospital of last resort for indigent veterans. But thanks to four remarkable photographs in the Minnesota Historical Society collections his story can now be shared.

SAVE THE DATE: 3RD ANNUAL TCCWRT PICNIC - JULY 18, 2023



Tuesday, July 18, 2023, from 4:00 to 7:00

Wabun B picnic area, Minnehaha Park

Food! Fun! Maybe a Trivia Contest!

STEVEN SCHIER'S TRIVIA QUESTION ANSWER:

Mark Twain.

CONTACT US:

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Can you contribute to a future newsletter? Writers are wanted to submit Civil War related articles to this newsletter.

Please submit your drafts to Bruce Cooper: earlofbuce@hotmail.com