



## THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

### Museum buys photo of Civil War soldier who saw Abraham Lincoln assassinated

By Meg Jones, Madison Journal Sentinel, April 13, 2014

Madison — Like most in Ford's Theatre that night 149 years ago today, Spencer Bronson figured the gunshot he heard was part of the play.

Since enlisting in Company B of the Wisconsin 7th Infantry, he had heard many gunshots. Bronson fought valiantly throughout the Civil War with the Iron Brigade — he was captured at Gettysburg, wounded in several battles and still carried a bullet in his right hip when he was sent to a hospital to convalesce. That's how he ended up in Washington, D.C., at the end of the war.

When Bronson read in a newspaper that President Abraham Lincoln, General Ulysses S. Grant and their wives were going to see "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theatre that evening, April 14, 1865, Bronson bought a ticket and walked three blocks from the hospital to the theater.

In chilling detail Bronson wrote to his sister Amanda Bronson back home in Fall River, Wis., what happened next: "A clang takes place, a dark form is seen to fall from the private box, his spurs catching in the flag as he descends. A second & he recovered & (arising) in a tragical attitude he draws a dagger & with his white face towards the crowd he repeated in Latin 'So be it ever to tyrants.'"

The Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison recently purchased at auction an original photo of Bronson, dressed in his uniform dating from around 1865 — the only known photo of him from the war.

The museum has acquired thousands of Civil War photos of Wisconsin soldiers and regularly seeks to add to its collection of original images.

This purchase was particularly important because, of all the eyewitness accounts of the first assassination of an American president, Spencer Bronson's is one of only a handful that include a translation of the words John Wilkes Booth screamed in Latin.

When Kevin Hampton, curator of research and public programs, noticed photos were being auctioned in December of Spencer Bronson and his brother, Manley Bronson, he researched the Fall River brothers.

Hampton originally became interested in them because of a family connection — he's a descendant of an Irish immigrant named John McMahon, who fought with the Bronson brothers in Company B. Hampton began searching the Internet for Spencer Bronson and found military records.

He also noticed that the 1996 book "We Saw Lincoln Shot: One Hundred Eye Witness Accounts" included a letter by S.H. Bronson. He wasn't sure that was the same Spencer Bronson whose photo he was trying to acquire.



Photo Wisconsin Veterans Museum Eventually, he noticed Bronson's handwriting on the back of his photo was the same as the letter, and both were signed S.H. Bronson. That's

how Hampton discovered Bronson wasn't simply a Wisconsin soldier who fought in the Iron Brigade, but a guy who saw Booth leap from Lincoln's theater box.

"For a history nerd, it was one of those 'Oh my gosh' moments," Hampton said.

It isn't known what happened to that original letter written the day after Lincoln died, and the envelope with 3-cent stamp addressed simply to Miss Amanda Bronson, Fall River, Columbia Co., Wisconsin. The last anyone heard of it was when it was sold at an auction of Civil War memorabilia in 1973 between unknown collectors.

Somehow, however, a photocopy of the letter and envelope became part of a collection of Lincoln memorabilia of the Lincoln Financial Group in Indiana. When the company's Lincoln museum in Fort Wayne closed in 2008, part of the collection found its way to the Allen County Public Library in Indiana. Hampton contacted the library and got copies of the photo of the actual letter, as well as a typed version.

In his letter to his sister, Spencer Bronson describes the chaotic scene as people shouted "hang him" and "shoot him" after Booth fled through the backstage to a horse waiting outside.

He saw a distraught Mary Todd Lincoln and heard her screams as men hoisted water and spirits to the box to be given to the dying president.

It was a couple of days before newspapers printed the name and photo of the assassin. But Spencer Bronson, a regular theatergoer, knew immediately who killed Lincoln.

He wrote his sister:

"I will also send you a paper with the full account of the affair & also a good



## THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

---

portrait of the murderer who I am shure is J. Wilkes Booth who I have seen before... the city is mad with excitement at the act. Three men have been shot dead by soldiers for saying they were glad the president was dead. Thus far the murderer has not been caught."

He also enclosed a handbill advertising the play and asked his sister to save it.

"It shows that perhaps not everyone was aware at the time it was John Wilkes Booth," Hampton said. "For Spencer Bronson it was the realization, 'Hey, I've seen that guy before.'"

Spencer Bronson returned to Wisconsin after the war and became a merchant and Fall River's postmaster. He eventually settled in South Dakota, got married, had four children and was elected to the state Senate. He died in 1930.

Jo Ann Welton of Rochester Hills, Mich., is a descendant of Spencer Bronson's older brother, Edward, a chaplain in Company K of the 32nd Wisconsin Infantry. Welton knew her ancestors had fought in the Civil War, but it wasn't until the Wisconsin Veterans Museum contacted her that she learned her great-great-uncle had been at Ford's Theatre.

"That was news to all of us. We knew that he had been in a lot of Civil War battles and was decorated, but we didn't know he was at Ford's Theatre," Welton said. "I was really surprised. I just couldn't believe it."

Iron Brigade memorabilia — photos, letters, documents, uniforms — is highly prized by collectors.

In 2008 a collection of 55 original letters by Spencer Bronson describing eloquently the battle of Antietam, where his brother Eli was killed, being taken prisoner on the first day of Gettysburg and getting

shot in the chest at the Battle of the Wilderness, among other events, was sold at auction for \$14,500.

Spencer Bronson's photo likely will be displayed next year at the museum, and it can be seen by the public in the archives.

What makes the Spencer Bronson photo unusual is he chose to put his Iron Brigade black hat on a table next to him when he sat for a Racine photographer.

Many soldiers were photographed without their hats, but for the Iron Brigade, the distinctive black hats were a source of pride.

The photo, called a *carte de visite*, cost Spencer Bronson 3 cents. Because they were so cheap, pretty much every Civil War soldier had his picture taken to send to families and sweethearts back home.

### Notre Dame historians give voice to victims of long-ago crimes

By Frederick Rasmussen, Baltimore Sun, March 28, 2014

Two Notre Dame of Maryland University history professors have toiled among faded and nearly forgotten documents and court cases for 15 years, trying to illuminate the shocking story of the sexual assault of women by Union soldiers during the Civil War and the response by the military justice system.

They will travel to The Hague, Netherlands, next month, where they will present a lecture on the subject, "Dangerous Liaisons: Working Women and Sexual Justice in the American Civil War," before a meeting of the European Association for American Studies.

The project brought together Charles F. Ritter, who during his 45-year career was a professor and

department chair at Notre Dame until retiring in 2012, and E. Susan Barber, his former student who is now a faculty member.

Beginning in 1998, Ritter and Barber's journey took them from the Maryland Historical Society to the Library of Congress and the National Archives, where they transcribed more than 400 trial transcripts of Union court-martials that are found in the papers of the Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Army.

They read diaries of women from the time who described the assaults, using such words as "ravaged" and referring to the attack as the "outrage."

The researchers often had to read between the lines to discover what had happened to a woman or a girl and then study court testimony.

"Finding this is a lot of work. Much of it was anecdotal language, digging through cases, finding file numbers, and every case was handwritten," said Barber. "These are 19th-century documents, and sometimes there was no attention to punctuation or spelling. At times, it was daunting."

They also combed through census records.

A 2009 essay they had written, "Physical Abuse ... and Rough Handling: Race, Gender and Sexual Justice in the Occupied South," appeared in the book "Occupied Women," published by Louisiana State University.

The authors decided to press on and expand their essay into a full-length book, "Sexual Justice in the American Civil War," which they believe is the first comprehensive study of Civil War-era sexual assault. They hope to have it published by LSU in 2015.

"Sexual violence in war has been a constant, from the rape of Lucretia in 510 B.C. to the rape of Muslim



## THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

---

women in the Bosnian War of the 1990s," they wrote in a book proposal to LSU. "The American Civil War was not exempt from this reality."

Cases examined and tried included rape, gang rape and rapes that progressed to murder. They also included crimes of sexual intimidation such as when a woman was stripped naked and forced to stand before soldiers, who poured cold water over her.

It wasn't until 1863 that the military declared rape by soldiers a crime that in some cases was punishable by death.

"Some 24 were executed [between 1863 and 1865]. Others were punished while some returned to their units," said Barber.

Ritter said that "one of the great moments of discovery was finding court transcripts at the National Archives because you could really feel the testimony of the women and visualize the incident, and sometimes children were witnesses, and their direct testimony was very moving."

Several years ago, Ritter visited the site where Grace Barnes, who did washing for Union troops stationed at a camp near Norfolk, Va., was raped the morning of April 28, 1864.

The authors wrote that Barnes was a "free woman of color." As she made her way home with a load of dirty laundry, six soldiers from the 20th New York Cavalry "dragged her into the bushes and took turns raping her."

The attack was so violent, Barnes later said in her testimony, that she suffered an injury to her bladder.

In another case, Charles Hunter, a private in the 7th Kentucky Cavalry, visited the home of Mary Kirksey, a laundress who sold milk and eggs to Union troops to help support herself and young son.

On May 18, 1864, he entered Kirksey's home, gagged her with a leather strap and raped her. The next day, he returned and sexually assaulted her again.

"During the American Civil War, nearly four hundred white and black women and girls ranging in age from 5 to 82 brought charges of rape, attempted rape and other crimes of sexual intimidation against Union soldiers and civilians contracted to perform services for the Union Army," the authors wrote.

### **Sunken Civil War boat set to become Gulf of Mexico 'shipwreck park'**

**By Carol Christian, Houston Chronicle, April 14, 2014**

All 27 crew members on the USS Narcissus died when the venerable steam tug sank during a violent winter storm in January 1866 off the coast of Florida.

Now, the shipwreck in 15 feet of water near Tampa is set to become an underwater archaeological preserve, the St. Petersburg Tribune reported.

The wreck of the U.S. Navy ship lost Jan. 4, 1866, off Egmont Key, Fla., has been nominated to become Florida's 12th "shipwreck park," according to a 2011 proposal from the Florida state archaeological research bureau.

"The designation is expected to make the wreck a destination for scuba divers and boost the tourist trade along Pinellas County beaches and in local dive shops," the Tribune reported.

Once the park is established, non-divers will also be able to view the shipwreck through brochures and the Museums in the Sea website, the proposal stated.

As stated in the 2011 proposal, the project to create a new historical attraction would involve cooperation among state, county and city officials, the U.S. Navy, local organizations and individuals.

The USS Narcissus will be unique among Florida's underwater archaeological preserves because it is U.S. Government property, the proposal states. Under the Sunken Military Craft Act of 2005, the U.S. Navy will continue to own the ship.

Built in 1863 during the Civil War, in East Albany, N.Y., the ship was commissioned as USS Narcissus at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in February 1864, according to the preservation proposal.



Photo By South Eastern Archaeological Services, Inc.





## THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

---

Isaac S. Bradbury, the acting ensign and final commander of the USS Narcissus

In August 1864, the ship served at Fort Morgan during the Union victory at the Battle of Mobile Bay. In December 1864, Narcissus hit a torpedo during a storm and sank, but no lives were lost and all the ammunition and weapons were removed, the proposal stated.

On Dec. 7 of that same year, while on picket duty at Dog River Bar, Mobile Bay, Narcissus struck a torpedo while paying out her anchor line during a fierce storm. The mine caused an explosion that left a large hole in the starboard side of the hull amidships. Although the vessel sank in 15 minutes, no lives were lost and all ammunition and arms were removed. It was taken to the Pensacola Naval Yard for repairs and remained there through the rest of the Civil War. It was on its way north for decommissioning when it sank in 1866, the proposal stated.

The Narcissus was investigated during the Tampa Bay Historic Shipwreck Survey by the Florida Aquarium, the proposal stated. The three-year project was conducted 2006 to 2009 under the archaeological direction of South Eastern Archaeological Services, Inc. Texas also has a marine archaeology program operated through the Texas Historical Commission but does not have shipwreck preserves comparable to those in Florida, said Amy A. Borgens, the state's marine archaeologist.

"We also don't have the type of visibility in our state waters that would make recreational diving on these types of sites desirable (usually less than 6 inches or zero-visibility)," Borgens said by email. "The locations of submerged archeological sites considered State Antiquities

Landmarks are protected and cannot be made public."

### Appomattox prepares for Civil War spotlight

By Katrina Koerting, The Richmond News & Advance, April 12, 2014

About 149 years ago today, thousands of people from around the country descended on Appomattox dressed in uniforms of blue and gray. Officials are preparing for a crowd of at least that size to visit the area this time next year in recognition of the same thing - the end of the Civil War, America's bloodiest conflict.

With the 150th anniversary of Gen. Robert E. Lee's surrender to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant less than a year away, county, town and Appomattox Court House National Historical Park officials are deeply involved in the planning process, along with state and local law enforcement, community members and staff from local businesses and attractions.

The National Park Service is spearheading the events - set for April 8 to 12 - with other local entities supplementing the park's activities. Some of the other groups hosting programs during the week are the Museum of the Confederacy, the park's friends group and the county's historical society.

Appomattox County Parks, Recreation and Tourism Director Anne Dixon estimates about 75 percent of the planning work is completed. A mostly finalized schedule of events has been posted to the county's website for six months. The only thing left to finalize are logistics with the park service, including traffic control and shuttles for the crowds. The National Park Service's incident command team, the group that orchestrated the sesquicentennials so far and other

big events across the country, plans to use hundreds of acres of fields for parking but is still working on transportation options with the county.

"We're not an area used to getting tens of thousands of people on a daily basis," said Ernie Price, the chief of education and visitor services at the park.

Schools already have scheduled spring break for that week, which should reduce traffic and will allow their parking lots to be used for the event. A Civil War ball is set for April 10 at Appomattox Primary School, and a lecture is set for the high school earlier that day.

One difficulty facing the team is deciding how to park and shuttle everyone without knowing the number of people coming. Visitation numbers are difficult to predict because of factors, such as weather and competing events, but one estimate is 30,000 people per day - twice the county's current population.

"We expect there's going to be a lot of people," said Jeff Taylor, the county's economic development director. "We want to make this an event that people will remember for the rest of their lives."

**Visitors will come from around the globe.**

"People across the world have studied this war," said Robyn Snyder, deputy public information officer for the sesquicentennial. "It's a real draw."

**Planning for years**

Discussions about the sesquicentennial have been occurring for several years with formal meetings beginning in 2011. There is an annual committee of 25 people made up of representatives from the park, county, town, chamber of



## THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

---

commerce, community organizations and businesses.

Members of the National Park Service's incident command team met in Appomattox from March 31 to April 4. Their visit included tours of the park to familiarize themselves with the land and their assignments, and they met with the committee and law enforcement.

"We know what the questions are from this week, now we've got to go forward and get answers," said Mike Litterst, public information officer for the command team.

A common concern people have is moving people quickly on the area's roads, which are mostly two-lane highways. Last year's Lockn' music festival in Nelson County was on the minds of state police throughout the discussions. They directed thousands of people off U.S. 29 and visitors complained about being stuck in traffic for hours.

The incident command group has experience with getting people in and out of the parks on two-lane highways efficiently, Litterst said.

Park staff, including Price, attended other sesquicentennials to prepare for Appomattox. Like these events, an additional 110 to 115 park rangers will join the park's 22 employees for the week.

"Appomattox has the benefit of going last," Litterst said in reference to the multiple Civil War commemorative events of the past several years.

Regardless of the preparations, "It's going to be congested," Taylor said. Multiple plans

Several possible plans are in the works to accommodate various aspects, including the weather and dignitaries.

"You have to plan for just about every contingency," Taylor said.

The weather is the biggest challenge facing the park service, because most of the events happen outside.

"We all remember April 9ths that were 80 degrees and sunny and we all remember April 9ths when the ground was covered in snow," Price said.

Wet weather, coupled with the number of visitors expected, could damage the grounds.

"We have to be careful about when and where we do things because we want people to enjoy the event but we also want the park to be in good shape when it's done," Price said.

### **Previous anniversaries**

Throughout the preparation, it's impossible to avoid reminiscing about the surrender's 100th and 125th anniversaries, especially for those who were in attendance.

Several committee members attended as children and still treasure photos of them wearing period dress at the centennial and mementos from the event, Price said.

He said he hopes to create similar lasting memories for everyone in attendance next year.

Price estimated about 10,000 visitors and 4,000 re-enactors attended the 125th anniversary of the surrender.

Appomattox County Historical Society member Wayne Phelps remembered the large crowds from the centennial.

"I expect it just about shut the county down," he said.

About 12,000 people attended the one-day centennial, while next year's commemoration will span five days, making it hard to draw visitation estimates from previous anniversaries, Litterst said.

Another difference is the technology that wasn't around 25 or 50 years ago. An information technologist has visited the park a few times to figure out how to improve the cellular and

wireless coverage for the week. The command team and staff plan to use email and cell phones to communicate with each other and the public.

There's a social media team that wasn't possible 25 years ago, and the team will encourage the guests to share their experiences, too, something that could pose a challenge if temporary wireless and cell towers aren't brought in for the week.

"It's a different world than it was 25 years ago," Litterst said.

### **Programs**

People are already describing the sesquicentennial as a bigger event than the centennial and 125th anniversary, which were only held at the historical park.

Next year, a number of other organizations are offering additional programs.

"I think we've got a lot of cooperation going on around Appomattox," Price said.

By overlapping programs throughout the area, it should spread the crowd out among the various sites.

"Hopefully, when it's over and they find out the total number of people, it doesn't feel like that because it's well spread out and organized," Price said.

The historical society will be putting on the fifth and final installment of the "Long Road Home" program, an annual weekend-long re-enactment focusing on events leading up to the surrender in 1865.

Phelps, the field director for this year's re-enactment, said he anticipates next year will be even bigger. This year, about 450 re-enactors filled up the industrial park. He said he couldn't even begin to guess the number of re-enactors and guests who will attend next year.



## THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

---

Linda Lipscomb, the Appomattox site director for the Museum of the Confederacy, said she hopes all of the park's visitors stop by the museum, which will feature its own programs and events.

"We hope to expose a lot of people to the Museum of the Confederacy and expose them to some history," she said, noting the museum houses Lee's sword and outfit worn during the surrender.

Established Civil War authors and historians from Virginia colleges and universities, including Virginia Tech and the University of Virginia, already are booked for the week. Planning for the 150th anniversary began last year at the museum, Lipscomb said.

There will be Grant and Lee reenactors who will deliver monologues or recreate scenes from history that week. Guests can dine with the generals April 10.

"These are both wonderful reenactors," Lipscomb said. "They both understand the men and how to portray them."

The museum has musical performances and vendors lined up, as well as the 2nd Virginia Cavalry reenactors, who will camp at the museum the whole week with 30 to 60 horses.

### **Volunteers excavate Ohio Civil War island prison**

By VANESSA McCRAY, The (Toledo) Blade, April 11, 2014  
JOHNSON ISLAND, Ohio (AP) — Civil War history hides under a grassy field tucked amid barren trees on Johnson Island, a patch of land in Sandusky Bay where captured Confederate prisoners were confined 150 years ago.

From 1862 to 1865, more than 10,000 Confederate inmates were held in the Johnson Island Civil War Prison. Some never left: about 250 white stones — a few with the stark engraving "unknown" — mark the nearby cemetery where men from Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee and other southern states found their final resting place.

Save for a modest plaque designating the National Historic Landmark, there are few obvious traces of the nearly 17-acre former prison on the island's eastern side.

But when the weather warms, schoolchildren, college students and researchers restart the painstaking archaeological excavation begun more than two decades ago.

First, volunteers are needed to clear branches felled during the harsh winter and start work on a trail along the property. Saturday marks the ninth year the prison site has participated in the Civil War Trust's Park Day, an event that draws thousands of volunteers to help maintain about 100 war sites across the country.

"A lot of these places have fairly small staff, and coming out of a winter, especially one like this past one, you have really major needs for upkeep and capital-improvement projects," said Mary Koik, spokesman for the Civil War Trust in Washington. "Something like this really gives you the bodies to be able to do a new walking trail or repair your fences."

The island-work bee attracts about 80 volunteers from northern Ohio and even some surrounding states, and the military prison site is the only Ohio location participating in this year's Park Day.

Under the watchful eye of David Bush, chairman of the nonprofit historic preservation organization

Friends and Descendants of Johnson Island Civil War Prison, and director of Heidelberg University's Center for Historic and Military Archaeology, work has progressed slowly to dig up and identify old objects buried there.

Bits and pieces pulled from the ground tell parts of the Civil War story: Nails, medicine bottles, ceramic plates and mugs, chimney bricks, chamber pots, and pieces of hard rubber carved by prisoners.

This season, archaeological work will continue at Block 8, a former housing block where about 250 prisoners were held.

A two-story wooden building measured about 125 feet by 29 feet, and through its wooden-floorboard gaps fell debris researchers now try so carefully to collect.

After the war, the prison site was farmed until about 1950, then abandoned. Trees took root and the prison's precise spot faded from memory until Bush began his research.

A white tent stretches over the site where archaeological digging will take place this season, beginning next week with a program for middle and high school students and, in the summer, a five-week field school.

Bush and a couple of Heidelberg students worked Wednesday to ready the area. They traipsed over a mud-splotted tarp spread beneath the tent, sorting buckets and preparing the site.

Seeing youngsters learn about archaeology is a highlight for Felicia Konrad, a Heidelberg senior from North Baltimore majoring in history and archaeology.

"I've seen so many little kids find something and be like, 'Oh, this is really cool,' even if it's just a piece of window glass," she said.





## THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

For Bush, the site's allure traces its rich history, preserved in both written accounts and in the dirt to be scraped away and examined.

"It's just that every year we discover more interesting things," he said. "It's got a great historical record; it's got a great archaeological record."

The Union located the prison there because the island was easier to defend than a mainland site, but it was close to Sandusky for access to supplies. Originally intended to house Confederate enlisted men as well, it soon held only officers.

Prisoners captured in battles such as Gettysburg and Vicksburg were brought to Johnson Island by train and boat. The prison's population peaked at more than 3,200 men during the latter stages of the war.

Preserving the history and educating people about the site's importance is the aim of the Friends and Descendants group, which will be recognized during the Park Day event with a Heritage Award from the Ohio Civil War 150 Advisory Committee. The committee, formed to recognize the war's milestone anniversary, will give out three such awards this year.

The site's role in Civil War history intrigues Bob Minton of Fostoria, an advisory committee member and trustee for the Friends and Descendants group. He will present the award Saturday.

"It's fascinating to me because, first of all, we know that in that area, for several years, several thousand Confederate officers were there; and a lot of these guys were the cream of southern society," he said. "They were walking that very ground every single day, and to me that makes it very unique."

### Trees planted in honor of Civil War soldiers

Herald-Mail, April 8, 2014

WILLIAMSPORT — As part of the Town of Williamsport's annual Arbor Day celebration, more than 100 community members gathered at Springfield Barn to help plant 120 trees.

The trees will not only benefit the environment, but they are connected to the town's rich Civil War history through the Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership's Living Legacy Project.

The project was created to commemorate the Civil War's 150th anniversary by planting or dedicating one tree for each of the 620,000 soldiers who died, as a living memorial for their individual and combined sacrifices.

For Williamsport, the Arbor Day tree planting and tree dedication were among the biggest tree-planting events to date, and were made possible through the support of the Maryland Forest Service.



Princess America Maryland Teen 2014 Kat Spillane helps plant the first ceremonial tree during the Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership's Living Legacy Project event with the Town of Williamsport.

The 120 trees, which were planted along the fence line at Springfield Barn at Byron Memorial Park, were dedicated to fallen soldiers who died during the Civil War. Through this collaboration, soldiers who died in Williamsport during the Civil War, and soldiers who were from Williamsport and died during the Civil War were part of the dedication ceremony, as well as unknown fallen soldiers.

Trees planted as part of the project will eventually stretch along the Journey Through Hallowed Ground National Scenic Byway, a 180-mile swath of land that runs from Gettysburg, Pa., to Thomas Jefferson's Monticello in Charlottesville, Va.

The partnership is engaged in raising funds to complete the \$65 million initiative. Individuals, businesses,



## **THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER**

---

schools and community groups can contribute to the project.

The partnership is seeking \$100 contributions to support and plant each tree. Donors can select a soldier to honor, as the trees will be geotagged to allow smartphone users to learn the story of the soldier, providing an educational component to engage interest in the region's historical heritage and literally bring the tree to life.