



WESTERN RESERVE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume 53

September 2018

Number 1

Meeting: Wednesday, September 12, 2018

6:15 PM Assemble
6:30 PM Buffet Dinner
7:30 PM Business Meeting
7:45 PM Presentation

Place: Baldwin Wallace University
Colony Room, Student Union
Corner of East Grand & Tressel,
Berea, OH 44017 – 440-570-009
www.westernreservecwrt.com

Presenter: Janet Croon

"The War Outside My Window"

Each year there are new additions to the massive collection of books written on the Civil War with no apparent end in sight. And, 2018 is no exception. For this year's Western Reserve CWRT speaker series, we'll be having two authors who have produced new books this year.

The first of these authors is here for our September Program. Her name is Janet Croon who lives in Virginia. Through the assistance of Savas Beatie we're happy to bring her to our opening season of our CWRT.

Her book is entitled The War Outside My Window: The Civil War Diary of LeRoy Wiley Gresham, 1860-1865. This is an account of a 12 y/o Georgian boy who suffered a horrific leg injury

The War Outside My Window

The Civil War Diary of
LeRoy Wiley Gresham, 1860-1865

which left him an invalid. He began keeping a diary in 1860 on what he discerned and saw happening all around him from accounts he read and what he had learned from others near him about the Confederacy. As his own life withered, LeRoy also writes of the demise of the Old South as well. His writings are intimate, observant, and telling.



A remarkable witness of the collapse of the Old South,
and the first glimpse of a privileged boy afflicted by

Our speaker edited and annotated this diary to help us see the world as this young boy witnessed it. This will be a great new season's beginning to our CWRT year. See you soon.

EDITED BY JANET ELIZABETH CROON

Western Reserve CWRT - Annual Membership Dues: \$30.00 Individual or \$40.00 Couple

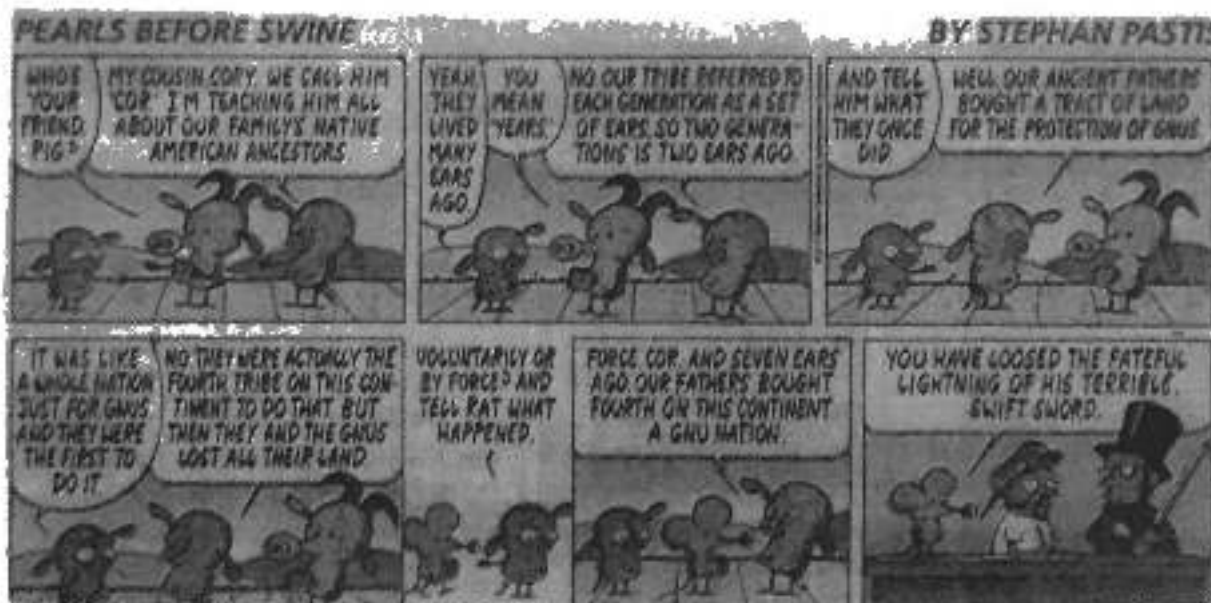
Dues are to be paid each year on the anniversary month of each person's membership. For example, if a person joins the CWRT in March, then March is the anniversary month for future dues membership. A member can see their dues status and anniversary month at the time of check-in.

Meeting Program: Each member for the monthly program is charged \$25.00 which includes a buffet dinner and the program presentation. For those not having dinner, a Program Fee of \$5.00 is required.

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This Month's Trivia Question

- Question 1: This Union general had the nickname of "Squash" while a cadet at West Point. Later, he was called "Guts" when serving with the U.S. regulars before the Civil War. Who was he?
- Question 2: What Lincoln cabinet member earned the nickname "General" at the start of the Civil War because of great influence over military decisions?



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Western Reserve CWRT information:

440-570-0009 (George)

www.westernreservecwrt.com

At the Front for Next Month:

Date: October 10th

Speaker: Dan Welch

Topic: Retreat from Gettysburg

A Pastime, Fading Into History

Re-enactment of the Civil War is in decline, and a crucial battlefield feels the loss.

By BRYN STOLE

GETTYSBURG, PA. — The sun rose on the second day of the battle of Gettysburg, 2018, to reveal a line of tents parked behind the Union Army's tents.

It was an amusing historical anachronism for the brigade's commander, Ted Brunan, 48, who was brushing his teeth with a horsehair toothbrush. "We try to be as authentic as we can without getting dysfunction," he said of his unit, several of whom were frying bacon and brewing coffee over a fire. They were camped in canvas tents that housed many of the 5,000 re-enactors at the event. Beyond the spectator stands and food stalls, the Confederates were camped just out of sight.

The 150th Gettysburg anniversary re-enactment, held over the second weekend in July, was a chance for dedicated hobbyists to blast away at one another with antique rifles and rekindle old friendships over campfire-cooked meals. Spectators paid \$40 to watch nearly a dozen mock skirmishes over the course of four days.

It was also a snapshot of a hobby in decline. Gettysburg is among the biggest re-enactments of the year, and it still draws thousands to the sweltering Pennsylvania countryside in the middle of summer.

But that's nothing compared with the re-enactments of the 1980s and '90s, when tens of thousands would turn out. In 1998, at the 125th anniversary of Gettysburg, there were an estimated 30,000 re-enactors and 80,000 spectators.

Many of today's re-enactors were born as the last Civil War veterans were dying, and grew up amid the celebrations and re-enactments of the centennial that lasted from 1961 to 1965. But the hobby's heyday was the '90s, during another moment of national fascination with the Civil War.

In 1990, Ken Burns's "Civil War" documentary pulled in nearly 139 million viewers (huge ratings for a PBS program), and James McPherson's 900-plus-page academic book, "The Battle Cry of Freedom," published in 1988, became a best seller. Interest in battlefield experiences was fueled by cinematic hits, like the 1989 Oscar-winning film "Glory" and "Gettysburg," a 1993 release that ran over four hours. (Hundreds of re-enactors were cast as extras.)

But crowds have dwindled in the last decade or so. Longtime hobbyists are retiring — soldiers in their 50s and 60s filled much of the camp at Gettysburg — and younger people aren't marching onto battlefields in the

Enthusiasm for a number of factors. Violence, some grouse, while

others point to the rising expense of gear. A reproduction rifle can cost over \$1,000.

Many are more introspective about it. In the 1980s and '90s, "the whole tone of the country was different," said Thomas Downes, 68, a retired machanic from Cleveland, who has been re-enacting for the Union side for 38 years. "Up until the last five or 10 years, the social causes of the war did not come into what we do," he said. "We were paying tribute to the fighting man."

Brad Keefer, a 61-year-old Union corporal and a professor of history at Kent State University, said, "Re-enactors look at the war as a four-year period between 1861 and 1865 in which you can cut out all the stuff leading up to the war and very much ignore everything that happened afterward."

"We don't get tangled up in all the messy bits, which are the causes and outcomes, which are complicated and uncomfortable," he said.

It's a vision of history placed in narrow context. The military details are meticulously researched and recreated down to the stitching of a uniform, but the broader social and political realities of the Civil War — the profound struggle over slavery and emancipation, racism and equality, citizenship and disenfranchisement — are largely confined to the margins.

Still, those issues can't be ignored. After a deadly white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Va., in 2017, where some demonstrators carried Confederate flags, at least two smaller Civil War re-enactments were canceled. That the battle flag Confederate re-enactors carry is still used as a means of



THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY AUGUST 2, 2018

could
next
page

racist intimidation makes it hard to defend as a purely historical object, independent of its racist implications.

"You build a comfort zone for the hobby to function," Mr. Keefer said. Pointing to the Confederate camp, he said, "And give them the benefit of the doubt that they weren't at Charlottesville."

THERE ARE MANY WAYS to be a Civil War re-enactor. It's not just the battlefield roles. At Gettysburg this year, there were also nurses and surgeons, nuns and chaplains and 1880s-era government volunteers.

Steven Mark Diatz, a retired librarian from Alexandria, Va., had appointed himself the role of war correspondent for *The New York Herald*, one of the largest newspapers at the time and, in Mr. Diatz's words, a "sensationalist rag."

"I was always intrigued by how the war was brought home," Mr. Diatz, 63, said. "Plus I can go anywhere on the battlefield as long as I stay out of the way of the firing."

Katie Mullins, who was portraying a volunteer for a long-extinct government organization, said that technically, she and her fellow volunteers on the United States Sanitary Commission shouldn't be at the re-enactment. "The Sanitary Commission arrived after war, but nobody does a re-enactment of a battle's aftermath," she said.

Despite the obsession with historical detail, there were plenty of re-enactors who brought air mattresses, propane burners,

flashlights and jugs of Gatorade. Some camped out with entire families in tow.

At least one Union unit spent several days marching along highway shoulders to get to this year's re-enactment, retracing the movements of the Army of the Potomac. Another unit traveled from Germany, and hundreds of cavalry re-enactors showed up with their horses.

One cavalryman, Nathaniel Williams Sr., said he grew up riding in southern Virginia but didn't learn that his ancestors served in the Second United States Colored Cavalry, a Union regiment of free blacks and liberated slaves, until later in life.

"I had no idea we were in the Civil War," said Mr. Williams, his horse grazing in a field behind his tent. "It was never taught to me. It opened up my eyes to a lot of things."

Mr. Williams first organized a re-enacting group about 20 years ago, recruiting relatives, friends and members of his church. This year, about two dozen people in his unit made the trip. They were the only black unit there.

Groups who portray United States Colored Troops — the designation the Army gave to ranks of all-black regiments — tend to re-enact battles where black troops played key roles in the fighting.

Army commanders initially made black regiments perform menial labor and didn't regularly order them into combat until after Gettysburg. "Even though we didn't fight here, we make it a family event," said Mr. Williams, sitting alongside his wife, Angela, who was wearing period dress. "We've got three days; we can spend time together and have fun."

The actual battle of Gettysburg was some of the most savage fighting in the Civil War, but no one wants to do early in a re-enactment. If you catch an imaginary bullet in the beginning of a skirmish, you miss out on most of the action. (For the cavalry, dying in

mock battle is even rarer because it means falling out of the saddle.)

But casualties inevitably mount. Sometimes, there's just "no way around it," Mr. Keefer said, not long after going down under intense fire from the Confederate lines. "We were getting killed there," he said. "There were just too many rebs shooting."

Once down, some took the opportunity to pull out smartphones and take photos. Bucket-carrying women made their way around the battlefield, topping off the canteens of both the living and the dead.

The most common dangers are heatstroke and heart troubles, problems that have grown as the average participant has aged. A Friday skirmish at this year's event was interrupted when an infantryman collapsed in the sun. Modern medics carted him off the field.

Buglers sounded taps when the fighting ended. The soldiers placed their caps over their hearts, shook hands and congratulated each other on a good fight.

Re-enactors from both sides danced at a ball on Saturday night, as did women in hoop skirts, bonnets and period jewelry. The Second South Carolina String Band played popular mid-1800s ballads and waltzes with a pro-Southern slant.

Back in the army camps, re-enactors pulled out bottles of whiskey and moonshine, traded stories and relished historical debates. "We'll talk about McClellan moving too slowly on the Peninsula, and then we'll talk about Joe getting divorced," said Frank Beachem, a 59-year-old from Manassas, Va., and onetime mall Santa who works in government procurement.

At one camp, a seasoned re-enactor tested a new recruit's recipe for hardtack, the tooth-cracking bread that formed the backbone of a soldier's field rations. "If it's edible, it's not real hardtack," he said. As he bit into a piece — barely edible, passably accurate — the sound of a banjo and fiddle wafted over.



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HISTORICAL FLOURISHES AND stacked rifles aside, the camp at a Civil War re-enactment resembles a Boy Scout jamboree. The slice of rustic outdoor life is one of the hobby's big draws. "I tell people it's a chance to have a guys' weekend out camping, just doing it a little more old-school than people are used to," said Christopher Wesp, 34, a relatively recent recruit and former Marine who served three tours in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"From my first event, the camaraderie that I felt and started building was very close and comparable to what it was like being in the service," he said. "That's the thing I missed most about being in the Marine Corps."

Politically, Civil War re-enactors tend to be conservative, perhaps a reflection of the

demographics of a hobby that skews heavily white and middle-aged. But it's not a monolith. One Union infantryman, a 20-year-old college student, described himself as a Marxist and card-carrying member of the Industrial Workers of the World.

Most re-enactors have strong preferences, but few stick exclusively to one side instead switching into Confederate or Union garb if the opposing ranks are too thin.

"We portray Confederates because they were the underdogs, and they had all the odds stacked against them," said Bill Adams, known as "Pork Pie," an engineer from southern Michigan who has been playing a Confederate soldier for the past 35 years. "The politics that caused the war, we don't even care about."

Some Confederate re-enactors, including Kenny Glass, 46, an emergency medical technician from Selma, Ala., said slavery had little to do with Southern secession, an assertion at odds with historical scholarship.

Don King, a Confederate re-enactor who grew up in North Carolina and now lives near Sykesville, Md., disagreed. The South fought the war because of slavery, he said, but "you can't fight a battle with only one side."

"Think of what a 'Star Wars' movie would be without the Empire," he said. "Just because you're acting on one side doesn't mean you embrace their historical beliefs."

Part of the problem is that the historical beliefs have modern day implications. Scrutiny of Civil War re-enacting from outside — as well as concern about its future on the inside — reached a fever pitch after the violence in Charlottesville. But it built along with protests demanding the removal of Confederate statues and monuments, spurred by the murder of nine black worshippers in Charleston, S.C., by the white supremacist Dylann Roof.

Recently, threats against re-enactors have disrupted several events. Last October, the police in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia discovered a suspicious device — possibly a pipe bomb — amid the concession stands at the annual Cedar Creek re-enactment. A month later, a threat was made against participants in a parade that commemorates Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Those incidents cast a shadow over Gettysburg this year. Word trickled out that Cedar Creek had been canceled entirely, and while the reason was not stated, it was obvious to many. "Who would mess with Civil War re-enactors?" said Mr. Downes, the retired machinist from Cleveland.



Longtime hobbyists are retiring, and younger people aren't marching onto battlefields in the same numbers.



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page



After a skirmish on Saturday afternoon, Mr. Downes was in a melancholic mood. He said that problems with the bear were forcing him to consider retirement.

Lighting his pipe in the shade of the general's tent, he reminisced on nearly four decades of re-enacting, saying it provided an outlet and escape.

His wife tagged along for years, portraying a camp washerwoman, but she finally caught what Mr. Downes called "a severe case of common sense" about a decade ago. "I've got friends whose knees are gone, who've got bad backs," he said. "You just keep coming out for the friendships."

Like other re-enacting units, his group regularly finds itself back in Gettysburg and other battlefield towns, setting up camp on National Park Service land to serve as a living history exhibition or meeting to practice drills. Afterward, the troops may head to a local bar for a cold beer, and they've learned to stay in period garb. Without their Union insignia, Mr. Keefer said with a wry smile, "no women are coming up and asking to take their picture with us."

"Without these uniforms," he said, "we're just a bunch of middle-aged schlubs."



FACT OR FICTION!

Civil War News

September 2018

First, Farthest, Last?

By Michael C. Hardy

For decades, the phrase "First, Farthest, and Last" has encapsulated North Carolina's role in the Civil War. Tar Heels proudly proclaim that they were the first at Big Bethel, advanced further than anyone at Gettysburg, and were last at Appomattox. Does North Carolina's claim align with facts, or is it fiction?

While similar words described the role of Confederate Tar Heels as early as 1874, the motto was firmly set in 1899: "first at Bethel, farthest at Gettysburg, and last at Appomattox" (*Charlotte Observer* May 10, 1899).

"First" comes from the battle of Big Bethel, Va., June 10, 1861. Killed in the lopsided Confederate victory was Pvt. Henry Wyatt, a Virginia native who had lived in North Carolina for five years prior to 1861 when he enlisted in the 1st North Carolina Volunteers. Deeply lamented across the South, Wyatt was buried in Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery and has markers both near Big Bethel where he fell, and on a statue on the grounds of the Raleigh statehouse ("The First Confederate Soldier Killed in Battle." *Southern Historical Society Papers*, Vol. 20, 1892, 63-68).

While Big Bethel was a good-sized scrap, Wyatt does not appear to be the first Confederate fatality. William R. Clark enlisted in an

artillery company being formed by William D. Pender (later a Confederate brigadier general). On April 19, 1861, before going south, Clark was killed by Union soldiers during the Baltimore riots (*Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser* April 20, 1861).

Of course, while Clark was not officially mustered, Capt. John Q. Marr, 17th Virginia Infantry, killed June 1, 1861, in a skirmish at Fairfax Court House, Va., could be the first. There are undoubtedly others. While the battle of Big Bethel was a larger affair than the June 1 Fairfax skirmish (fewer than 200 involved at Fairfax; around 5,300 at Big Bethel), and it was a Confederate victory by mostly Tar Heel soldiers, Marr was killed in combat a week earlier. The "First" tagline is a myth.

"Farthest" refers to the July 3, 1863, afternoon attack at Gettysburg, generally called Pickett's Charge, although Pickett only commanded a third of the attacking force. The position where Pettigrew and Trimble's Divisions attacked was 100 feet beyond where Pickett's gallant charge culminated. Remains of numerous Tar Heels, like Lt. Iowa Michigan Royster of the 37th North Carolina and Capt. Edward F. Satterfield, 55th North Carolina, were found within feet of the inner angle's stone wall. While Pickett's men captured their section of the wall for the briefest of moments, Pettigrew's

and Trimble's commands pushed 20-30 yards beyond the Virginians' position (John R. Satterfield, "Last at Gettysburg: The Story of a Confederate Captain." *Gettysburg Magazine* No. 26 (July 2002): 94-113).

Another farthest claim came at Chickamauga, where five North Carolina regiments fought. The 20th North Carolina captured artillery and pushed on to the edge of Kelly Field while the 58th North Carolina pushed the Federals off Snodgrass Hill late on September 20, 1863. In both cases, North Carolina earned the title of farthest (Michael C. Hardy *The Fifty-eighth North Carolina Troops: Tar Heels in the Army of Northern Virginia*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010, 80-93).

North Carolina's other claim was that her soldiers were last at Appomattox. They captured the final cannon taken from the Army of the Potomac; Maj. Gen. Brian Grimes planned the last battle; and Brig. Gen. W.R. Cox's Tar Heel brigade made the last charge and fired the last volley. In that last attack, probably around noon April 9, Sgt. Ivy Ritchie, 14th North Carolina, was struck and killed. The remainder of his

regiment was soon captured; probably the final members of the Army of Northern Virginia captured while fighting.

For many years, Ritchie was interred in the Popular Grove National Cemetery, under a Union marker. In 2008, the Sons of Confederate Veterans argued he had been misidentified. The National Park Service agreed. North Carolinians, then, indeed have a claim on the title of "last"

There were many then, just as there are now, disputing the First, Farthest, Last claims of North Carolina. Tar Heel soldiers shed blood at the battle of Big Bethel in June 1861, went further than Pickett's Division at Gettysburg, and were still fighting at Appomattox as Lee attempted to surrender April 9, 1861. Perhaps there is more fact than myth to their claim.

(*Five Points in the Record of North Carolina in the Great War of 1861-65*, Goldsboro, NC: Nash Brothers, 1904: 59-71; Weymouth T. Jordan Jr., and Louis H. Manarin, *North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865, A Roster*, Vol. 5 Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1975, 471).



The grave marker of Henry L. Wyatt, Richmond, Va.

Lincoln Items May Be Sold to Ease Debt of Nonprofit

By JULIA JACOBS

An Illinois nonprofit bearing Abraham Lincoln's name is so deep in debt that it is considering selling some of the 16th president's possessions, including one of his iconic stovepipe hats and bloodstained gloves from the night of his assassination.

In 2007, the private nonprofit, the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation, in Springfield, Ill., borrowed \$23 million to buy an expansive collection of Lincoln artifacts from a private collector. More than a decade later, the foundation has more than \$9 million remaining on the loan, Carla Knorowski, the foundation's chief executive, said.

For 11 years, the state-run Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum has had access to the collection, and that organization's leaders say their priority is to keep the items available for public viewing.

"Prior to our purchase of these items, the only way you would have ever seen the hat or the gloves would be to have known the collector," Ms. Knorowski said. "And know her well enough to knock on her door."

Other headliners in the collection of 1,400 artifacts include locks of Lincoln's hair, his presidential seal, unpublished letters to his

wife, pages with scrawled arithmetic from when he was a boy and the quill that sat on his desk the night he was shot in 1865.

The foundation has tried to raise the rest of the money by pleading with potential donors and asking state government officials to disburse millions of dollars in grants to save the collection, Ms. Knorowski said. The foundation's staff began a GoFundMe fundraiser in May, which has garnered only a fraction of the funds needed before the loan must be paid in full in October 2019.

On Wednesday, the foundation's board agreed to start the search for auction houses. This doesn't mean artifacts will go on the market any time soon, however. The foundation is starting the process now because it can take several months, Ms. Knorowski said.

Before the foundation acquired these items, they were part of what was considered the largest privately held collection of Lincoln-related artifacts in the world, according to the museum. The collector, Louise Taper, has had a passion for Lincoln since the 1970s.

She gained the money to fuel her collecting after she married Barry Taper, a scion of a prominent Los Angeles family whose father made a fortune in the savings and loan business.

When the foundation purchased the \$25 million collection, \$2 million worth of artifacts were given as a charitable donation, leaving the foundation to pay the remaining \$23 million.

In June, the foundation tried to ease its debt by selling an unexpected item in the Lincoln-centric collection: a dress of Marilyn Monroe's.

Ms. Monroe was apparently a die-hard fan of Lincoln's, but be-

cause she was tangential to the rest of the collection, Ms. Knorowski said the foundation decided to sell off her items — including her dress and photographs, which fetched \$54,000.

Amendment to end slavery. Selling off artifacts and documents from the collection would be a "loss to all Americans," Alan Lowe, executive director of the library and museum, said in a statement. He said he was confident, though, that in the event of an auction the museum would thrive without the collection.

But Ms. Knorowski said the museum was at risk of losing some items that bring Lincoln's personality to life. "We don't want to auction," she said. "But if we're put in that position, we have to do our fiscal responsibility."

Seth Bongartz, the president of Hildene, an estate in Manchester, Vt., that belonged to Lincoln's son Robert, said his museum also has one of the president's stovepipe hats on display. The hat, one of three known to have survived, is a draw for visitors because people strongly associate it with Lincoln's character, Mr. Bongartz said.

Although it seems like the foundation has exhausted its financial options, Mr. Bongartz said he hoped the artifacts remain on display rather than being sold and tucked away into a private collection.

"They do belong to the public," he said. "To have them remain accessible would be the best of all possible worlds."

Keeping a stovepipe hat and bloody gloves on public display.

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If some of the items in the Taper collection were ultimately sold, the state-run museum would hardly be bereft of Lincoln exhibits. The museum has thousands of items, including a printing of the Emancipation Proclamation signed by the president and the House of Representatives' resolution for the 13th

There was a lot to see at the Westlake Historical Society's Antique, Vintage & Craft Show



Civil War reenactors representing the 7th Ohio Voluntary Infantry, Company K, were on hand to add a little 1800s history. The original 7th O.V.I. fought at Antietam and Gettysburg. The regiment, known as "The Fighting Cocks," wore a rooster pin (inset).