

The Civil War 150 Years Ago

By William Baillie

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In the autumn months of 1861 there were few major battles between the armies of North and South. After the first Battle of Bull Run in July—a defeat for the North—both sides spent the next months in enlarging, equipping and training their forces.

There was one arena of important fighting: on the coast of the Carolinas. Union navy and army forces seized control of the coastline of North Carolina in late summer and then, in the Battle of Port Royal on November 7, gained control of the coastal islands of South Carolina. Thus the North was able to impose an effective blockade of the South's Atlantic coast and prevent the import of war supplies and the export of cotton.

In Columbia County, these months were marked by strong recruiting efforts for local regiments and by heated, sometimes rabid arguments in the newspapers about the issues in the War—but not about the War itself, for after the South fired on Fort Sumter all sides in the local press supported the North's "righteous" effort to save the Union. In the fall election for an Assemblyman, two judges, and five county row offices, the Democratic ticket won a clean sweep with an average majority of 850 over Republican candidates.

Below are four samples of local newspaper items in the autumn months of 1861. Together, they suggest the varied ways that Columbia Countians were responding to the War.

A County Political Meeting

In the age before radio and TV, political meetings were important entertainment. The coming of war made these meetings even more popular, as the following article shows. It is

hard now to imagine 2,000 people assembling at a village as small as Rohrsburg to listen to 90-minute speeches, but such gatherings were common in the 1860s. This article appeared in the Star of the North on September 4, 1861.

ROHRSBURG MASS MEETING Union Democrats in Council.

Over two thousand citizens of Columbia county, met at Rohrsburg, on Saturday last, (Aug. 31,) in Mass meeting, to ratify the late Democratic Nominations, and to consider the State of the Union. Stands and Seats were prepared in an adjacent Grove, for the accommodation of the vast multitude, where at one o'clock, several hundred Democratic Ladies, escorted by THREE MILITARY COMPANIES, in full Uniform, with Flags waving and Drums beating, viz. — "Greenwood Rangers," Capt. Geo. W. Utt; "Demo. Union Home Guards," Capt. J. R. Millard; "Forks Independent Riflemen," Capt. R. Laborer, and organized. The following were the officers of the day.

President—EDWARD M'HENRY, Esq.

Vice Presidents:--John Robison, Isaac DeWitt, Peter Girton, Thos J. Welliver, Abraham Moore, Conrod Adams, Caleb Moore, Samuel R. Kline, Esq., John M'Henry, Jr., Jno. J. Stiles, Absolom M'Henry, Edward R. Albertson, Dr. Ephraim Kesler, John Kresler, Samuel Gilaspy and Wm. Cole.

Secretaries:--Isaac A. Dewitt, George Derr, Wm. H. Jacoby, Capt. J. R. Millard and Capt. Geo. W. Utt.

The meeting thus organized, Col. TATE, was called upon for an Address. He made a few opening remarks—in which he briefly discussed the State of the Union, the condition of the Country, and the interests of the Democracy. Believing that the hope of the Union, and its free institutions, were dependent upon the sacred preservation of the Constitution, in all its original compacts, he urged his fellow democrats to stand

firm upon the ramparts of the Constitution, and to rally to its support, as their only guarantee for the continuance of the Government and the Sheetanebor of the Union. His remarks were received with great approval.

Mr. T. announced, that he had the pleasure of introducing ASA R. BRUNDAGE, Esq., of Luzerne, and THOMAS CHALFANT, Esq. of Montour, to the meeting.

A. R. BRUNDAGE, Esq., of Luzerne county, was then called to the stand and addressed the audience for an hour and a half, making a sound Union Democratic Speech.— He first took a historical review of the principles upon which the Union was founded, the objects for which Governments are formed, and then proceeded to show the terrible character of our Country's calamities.— In a strain of true eloquence, he depicted the horrors of civil war, and advocated the necessity of preserving the Union and the Constitution at all hazards, and at whatever cost. He placed the responsibility of this unnatural strife where it belonged, equally upon the Northern Abolitionists and the Southern disunionists....

A War Song

As in most wars, songs became an important means to whip up enthusiasm in the Civil War. Here is one dedicated to Bloomsburg's Iron Guards and printed on the front page of The Star of the North on October 2, 1861:

UNION WAR SONG

**Dedicated to the Bloomsburg Iron Guards,
now at Washington.**

Come, freemen, assemble, our country's in danger;
The national ensign is sprinkled with blood,
And traitors have sullied the stars of Columbia,
Polluted the soil where a Washington stood.
Then 'rouse, Sons of Freedom, from valley and
mountain,

The blood of your *brothers* is warm on the plain,
And millions of heroes with Scott and McClellan,

Are burning with vengeance to wipe out the stain.

Remember the days when your patriot fathers
Unlimbered their pieces at liberty's call,
And stood 'neath the folds of the star spangled
banner,

'Till victory crowned them at tyranny's fall;
Then awake, ye bold freemen *remember Manasses*,
And the blood of your martyrs, now red on the
plain,

And join the brave legions of Scott and McClellan,
The Union the country, and laws to sustain!

... [Two omitted stanzas include the names of twenty Union states fighting in defense of the Red, White and Blue.]

Then friends of the Union, unsheathe your bright
sabres,

And swear by the graves of your patriot sires,
To stand by your country and free institutions,

In defence of your homes, your altars and fires;
Our nation is arming, the war cry is vengeance,
The dark clouds of battle encircle each plain,

Then freemen assemble, to Washington hasten,
There Scott and McClellan will lead you to fame.

VOLUNTEER.

(See next page)

Life in a Regimental Camp

The following article concerns a regiment raised by Col. J. R. Jones of Eagles Mere in nearby Sullivan County (originally a Philadelphian). The writer describes the training regimen outside Philadelphia and provides a typical view of military life before marching to a battlefield. Col. Jones' 58th Pennsylvania Regiment included a right wing recruited at Philadelphia and a left wing from northern counties. From May 1862 until the end of the war the 58th saw steady action in Virginia and Carolina. The article below appeared in the Columbia Democrat on November 4, 1861.

Col. J. Richter Jones' Regiment

Col. J. RICHTER JONES, of Sullivan county—our excellent friend Judge Jones—as will be seen by his War Card in this Journal, has turned Soldier, and is raising a Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers for service in the United States Army. Col. JONES is a Union Patriot and will make a gallant Commander. The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, of last week, thus speaks of the Colonel's Camp:—

J. RICHTER JONES' CAMP BEYOND MANAYUNK.—Col. J. Richter Jones is forming an infantry regiment with two flank companies of rifles and a battery of guns. The camp is situated on a high hill well drained, and commanding one of the most beautiful views that can be found for many miles around the city. In one glance Germantown, Chestnut Hill and Wissahickon valley are visible. About 400 men are in camp, but expect a large addition shortly, several companies from the interior of the State being on their way. There is no sickness whatever, owing, no doubt, to the fine position of the grounds.

The majority of the men have been recruited in Philadelphia, and the remainder from the eastern part of the State.—The reveille is sounded at sunrise, when the men arise and

commence their duties. They are drilled four times a day. The squad drills are at 8 A. M., and half past nine A. M.; the company drill is at two and a half P. M., and the dress parade at half past four P. M. There are at all times many visitors to the camp, who very often obstruct the officers in the performance of their duty. There is a fine spring of water at the base of the hill, to which the men are glad to resort after a hard drill.

The camp has been visited by military officers high in rank, and pronounced to be one of the best in the neighborhood of Philadelphia in point of situation, order, cleanliness, and respectability....

Abolition as Treason

The issue of slavery may have been the root cause of the Civil War, but Abolition was not the overt aim of the North in the War's first years. To the contrary, here is a front-page essay from the Columbia Democrat of November 2, 1861 that labels abolitionism as Treason! (The article was first printed in the Philadelphia Evening-Journal on October 8.) A very large turn-around in public thinking was needed to move toward acceptance of full emancipation of slaves by War's end.

The War for the Union—The Treason in the North

There is no other question now before the people than the preservation of the Union—or, in other words, our National existence. On this great question there can be but two parties: those who are for the Union, and those who are against it. Those who are for our glorious Union and its Constitution are the only patriots, and those who directly or indirectly assail the Union and its Constitution are traitors. This must be plainly understood.

The Union and Constitution are one and inseparable, and those who, for years, have scorned both, are Traitors, and they who, in this fearful hour of peril, oppose the Union and the Constitution and the Government, which the Constitution established and entertained, are disloyal men, disunion men; they are traitors—the enemies of our country.

Congress, formally, solemnly, by a *unanimous vote*, declared this war to be a war for *the preservation of the Union and the Constitution, and for the maintenance of the laws, and for nothing else*. The President and his Cabinet have distinctly recognized, sanctioned, and adopted this great and momentous truth. The war then is for this one great purpose, and those who attempt, directly or indirectly to change this purpose, and substitute another in its place, whether for the *abolition of slavery* or any other object, than that stated above, are in direct opposition to the Government; are dividing the sentiment of the North, when they should be endeavoring to coalesce and cement the union of those states, and they are rebels against the United States. They must be looked upon as rebels, disunionists and traitors for they aim at the overthrow of the best government on which the sun has ever shown [*sic*].

[*The writer goes on at length to discuss the recent Fast Day proclaimed by President Lincoln for national repentance. Some preachers used the pulpit on that day to “inflame the public mind” with anti-slavery sermons. The article ends with a quote from a speech by Gov. Wright of Indiana:*]

“There is more danger this day from a divided North than from anything else.— A firm, decided, united North will settle the question, and that speedily. But we must not listen to these violent, miserable Abolitionists of the North who are asserting that the object of this war is to interfere with the institutions of the South.— This is what the secessionists

of the South love to hear, because it unites the South just in proportion as it is believed.”