

The Bugle



Quarterly Journal of the
Camp Curtin Historical Society
and Civil War Round Table, Inc.

Spring 2009
Volume 19, Number 1



*Victorian Dance Ensemble
performing troupe of the
Civil War Dance Foundation*

"The field upon which we now stand will be known as classic ground, for here has been the great central point of the organization of our military forces. When my administration of public affairs will have been forgotten and the good and evil will be only known to the investigation of the antiquarian, Camp Curtin, with its memories and associations, will be immortal."

- Governor Andrew Curtin, 1865

The Bugle • Spring 2009, Volume 19, Number 1

Upcoming Society Events *Mark your calendar now!*

April 26 – Monument Clean-Up

Join us for our spring clean-up around the 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry Monument at Gettysburg National Military Park. To help, telephone Jack Thomas at 717-766-1899.

June 20-21 - Civil War Days

The annual commemoration of the Confederate invasion of Cumberland County and the Union defense of the Harrisburg area will be marked by a Union encampment, Civil War artifact displays at Negley Park in Lemoyne.

August 8 - Summer Picnic

Our annual picnic for members and friends will be in the pavilion at Negley Park, Lemoyne.

September 13 - Harrisburg Cemetery Tours

Join us on a walk through history and meet the "residents" of the Harrisburg Cemetery on Sunday, September 13.

Book Discounts for Members

The Civil War and More Book Store offers Camp Curtin Historical Society members a 10% discount on their entire purchase and makes a 5% donation of the pre-tax sales total to the Society's historic preservation fund. Located at 10 South Main Street in Mechanicsburg, the store offers thousands of items on the Civil War, WWI and WWII. For more information, store hours and directions, call 717-766-1899 or visit www.civilwarandmore.com.

Cover: The Victorian Dance Ensemble members dance in the Great Hall of the old U. S. Patent Office, the site of Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Ball in 1865. The building is now home to the Smithsonian's American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery. Rebecca Kesler and Tyrone Cornbower (in the center), both Camp Curtin members, do a two hand turn during the Lancer's Quadrille.

Camp Curtin Historical Society and Civil War Round Table

**Post Office Box 5601
Harrisburg, PA 17110
Telephone: 717-732-5330**

**Home Page:
<http://www.campcurtin.org>**

Board of Directors

**L. E. Keener-Farley
President**

**Robin G. Lighty
Vice-President**

**Mary Wright
Treasurer**

**Billie Ramsey
Secretary**

Directors:
*Margaret Blough
Craig Caba
Sharon Caba
Beverly Babcock
Thomas Hilbush
Nancy Otstot
Jack Thomas
Jeff Witmer*

Ex Officio Members:

**Rev. Andrew Bradley, Sr.
Camp Curtin Memorial-
Mitchell U.M. Church**

Send articles and photographs to:

Editor
**Camp Curtin Historical Society
P. O. Box 5601
Harrisburg, PA 17110**
Telephone: 717-732-5330
Email:
campcurtin1861@aol.com

Albert M. Gambone 1939-2008



Al Gambone, noted Civil War author and longtime member of the Camp Curtin Historical Society, passed away in December. Al wrote biographies of generals from his hometown of Norristown, Pa., including Winfield Hancock, John F. Hartranft, Adam Slemmer and Samuel Zook. He

also found time to write books about Lee at Gettysburg and of Gen. Darius Couch.

Al joined us several times at special events, helping with the unveiling of the plaque on the Hartranft statue in Capital Park and the dedication of the Fort Couch monument, as well as speaking to the Society on his various books.

He was always willing to share his passion for the Civil War with others. Historian Ted Alexander remembered that Al was outstanding at handling question and answer sessions at seminars, “[he] was always respectful and knowledgeable, not pompous.” Al will be missed by all who knew him but we will remember him fondly.

Local History Available

Civil War Harrisburg, a Guide to Capital Area Sites, Incidents and Personalities, the 60-page illustrated booklet edited by Lawrence Keener-Farley and James Schmick, and published by the Camp Curtin Historical Society, is available for \$10.00 (tax and shipping included). Send your check made payable to *Camp Curtin Historical Society* to: CCHS, P.O. Box 5601, Harrisburg, PA 17011.

Endangered Battlefields

The Civil War Preservation Trust released its ten most endangered battlefields for 2009. These sites are threatened by mining, erosion, and commercial development.

1. Cedar Creek, Virginia
2. Fort Gaines, Alabama
3. Gettysburg, Pennsylvania
4. Monocacy, Maryland
5. New Market Heights, Virginia
6. Port Gibson, Mississippi
7. Sabine Pass, Texas
8. South Mountain, Maryland
9. Spring Hill, Tennessee
10. Wilderness, Virginia

For more information about the efforts of CWPT to preserve our history, visit their website at www.CivilWar.org.

Educational Outreach

The arrival of spring marks not only warmer weather but the time most teachers reach the Civil War in their curriculum. Camp Curtin's educational outreach program is once again providing speakers to schools. With many schools cutting back on field trips to Gettysburg, we provide students with in-school opportunities to see artifacts and learn about local history. Any school (or civic organization) that needs a guest speaker on the Civil War should contact the Society by telephoning 717-732-5330 or email campcurtin1861@aol.com.



Larry Keener-Farley explaining corps insignia and headquarters flags to a class at Central Dauphin Middle School.

Dancing During the Civil War



Dancing was one way to forget – if only for an evening – the fiery trial of the Civil War. During the mid-nineteenth century dancing was one of the few leisure activities in which men and women could participate. Given the chance, almost everyone danced during the time period. North and South, rich and poor, young and old, urban and rural, black and white, even slaves held balls. About the only people who were not dancing were those who had a religious scruple against it and some sources report that even they were dancing.

Unlike modern dancing that is couple oriented, dancing in the mid-Victorian era was much more “social.” In much of America most dances were done by groups of people in formations of circles, squares or lines, with the couples standing next to each other in the “open position.” Couples interacted with other couples and often changed partners during the dances. This type of dancing survives today in modern square dancing and contra dancing.

Depiction from Harper's Weekly of the Virginia Reel at a military ball held in Huntsville, Alabama, by the non-commissioned officers and privates of the Union's 15th Army Corps in March 1864.

This type of dancing has relevance to the military side of the era since dancing could be considered the first “drill” for young men who would become soldiers during the Civil War. The formation dances taught them their right from left, how to keep marching time, how to maneuver in a formation, the importance of team work and what would happen if they were not in the right place at the right time.

Although the “closed position” for the waltz and polka (called “round dances” at the time) had been around for decades, this type of dancing was considered scandalous by many. An 1863 editorial in *The Richmond Whig* expressed the views of many in the North and South, especially in small towns:

We regret extremely to hear that these "round dances" are becoming all the rage at fashionable parties and at the "big hops" at the great hotels. Words cannot express our detestation and abhorrence of these dances. They ought not to be tolerated . . . let us taboo and kick out of respectable circles immodest and impure dances and them that dance them.

The comments have a familiar ring for parents of all generations. As in times past and present, young people ignored their elders and the new form of dancing glided into the ball room.

Although there were strict rules of behavior, they tended to add an agreeable degree of formality and decorum that has been lost in today's world. Introductions were very important to class conscious nineteenth century people. They generally did not mix socially with other people much above or below their social class and never with anyone with whom they had not been formally introduced. A formal social introduction was made when one of your friends introduced you to a new person, with your permission ("May I introduce?"; "May I present?"). Once formally introduced, you could recognize and greet each other in public, you could visit the other person's home, you could request assistance from the other person, and, most importantly, a gentleman could ask a lady to dance. At a ball, there was also an introduction merely for the purpose of dancing, which carried none of the social obligations of a formal introduction.

Most etiquette and dance manuals of the time suggested that it was ill-mannered to dance with the same person all evening. Some going as far as to warn a husband that he should not dance with his wife more than twice in an evening. Everyone at a ball had a social duty to mingle and to ensure that everyone else had a pleasant time. This sense of good fellowship and sociability led to Stephen Douglas (who had just lost the 1860 election to Lincoln) dancing with Mary Todd Lincoln at the 1861 Inaugural Ball.

Dances were called by a dance master and he was assisted by floor managers, who helped to arrange the various formations and relay dance calls. The order of dances was usually printed on a dance card, distributed to guests as they arrived.

Sometimes there were lines to write in the name of prospective partners while others merely listed the dances.

Balls were frequent during the winter when the armies were not on campaign. A ball held in Harpers Ferry in 1864 was typical. Col. William Lincoln of the 34th Massachusetts described the event in some detail:

The ladies, God bless them! Were there in large numbers. And oh! The dresses! And Ah! The undresses! Sprigged Muslins, and other gauze-like fabrics, floated round forms of 200 pounds, at the least, of good solid adipose matter; and heavy, stiff black silks stood out from and helped cover skeletons, whose bones could almost be heard rattling an accompaniment to the music of the dance. Flashy calicoes contrasted with heavy, glaring red merinos. High-necked and long-sleeved dresses, jealously guarded from, perchance, a too searching eye the least particle of flesh, dry and withered too often, it is true; an again, there were other dresses so cut and disposed as to reveal the rich amplitude of shoulders and bosom to any who would not turn away. The room looked beautifully. A chandelier, made by a circle of bayonets, suspended from the ceiling, being particularly admired. For supper we had three varieties of cake, piled upon broad, shallow, white crockery dishes, sweet water grapes, carefully picked from the stem, stewed oysters, and a whitish, lumpy looking compound, unrecognizable by taste, but announced as chicken salad. This by a fashionable caterer from Baltimore.



Harper's Weekly showed "The Supper Room" at a ball held by the U.S. 3rd Corps in 1864.

In camp, enlisted soldiers tried to enliven their dull season with dancing but a lack of women often led to some humorous results as reported by Pvt. Charles Bardeen of the 1st Massachusetts in his post-war recollections:

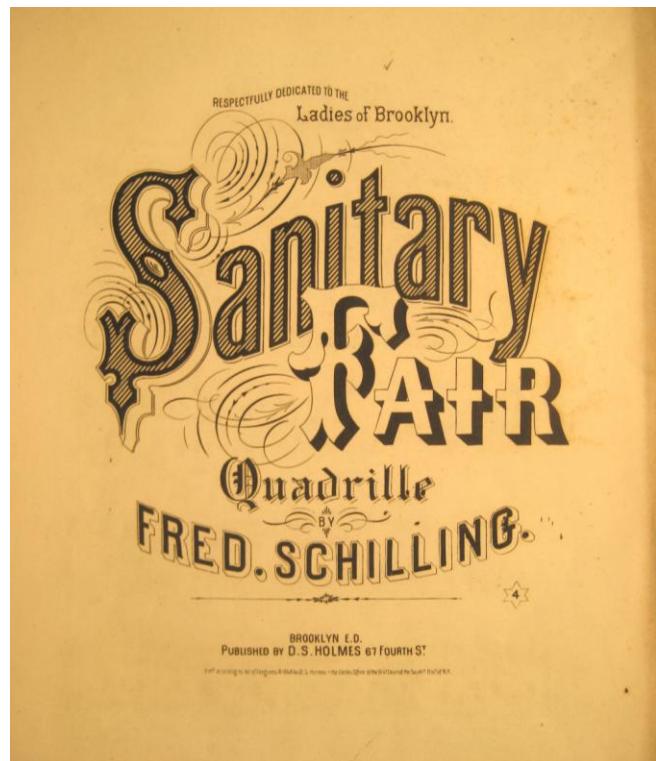
What I especially remember of this evening is the psychological effect of skirts. When it became known that the officers were to give us the use of their building for this ball some of the men sent home for various articles of women's finery, including hoop skirts then in vogue. The men who dressed themselves in these garments were by no means the most feminine in the regiment, but the effect upon the rest of us was to produce the impulse of protection. The Excelsior brigade had not been invited, and toward midnight they attempted to force an entrance, using long poles as battering rams against an end door. As they pushed in and the fight began Jim McCrae happened to be walking on my arm, and I put myself in front of him as inevitably as if he had been a girl fifteen years old. But only for an instant. Jim was an Irishman of the Kilkenny type, red-haired, freckled face, blue eyes, always good-natured but always spoiling for a row. He swished his skirts out of the way, pulled up sleeves showing arms as remarkable for their whiteness as for their strength, and sailed into that Excelsior crowd with both fists. Only a few had got in and they were soon thrust out again and the door securely fastened. The dance went on, and I think Jim and I finished the promenade, but the rest of the night I had a sort of sub-consciousness that in spite of his skirts he was quite able to take care of himself.

Since there are no films of 1860s dancing, no one knows exactly how dances were performed. Vintage dance historians have recreated dances from a variety of sources, including period dance manuals, dance masters' hand written notes, diaries and letters, and even drawings of dances. It is clear from primary sources, however, that there was considerable variation in dancing, based on social class, urban or rural residence, age of dancers, geographic area, ethnic group, and whether the dancers took professional dance lessons. Most people probably learned to dance by reading dance manuals, practicing at home and then going to balls.

Quadrilles were the most popular and common dances of the time and often accounted for half or more of the dances at a ball. Quadrilles were the forerunners of today's square dances but they

were not the hand-clapping, foot-stomping barn dances of the modern era. They came to America from the royal courts of Europe and retained their elegance and sophistication into the early twentieth century, when they evolved into their American form as square dances.

Quadrilles were long dances; each quadrille had five figures or series of moves. Each couple was designated by their position in the square (top, right, bottom, or left) and each couple would lead the group, prompted by the caller, through the series of moves for that figure. Thus each series of moves was repeated four times. Often the individual figures were split up and danced at different times during the evening. The Lancer's Quadrille was one of the most popular dances of the late nineteenth century and appears on almost every dance card from the Civil War.



The war and politics entered the ball room occasionally. Dances were sometimes renamed or designed by dance masters in honor of the hero of the moment. In February 1862, it appears the "Virginia Reel" was renamed the "McClellan Reel" at a ball in Philadelphia. Music was often named or dedicated to generals, battles or to honor a cause, such as the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair held in 1864 to raise money for the war effort (*above*).



The Camp Curtin Historical Society has been fortunate over the years in having a close relationship with the Victorian Dance Ensemble, the performing troupe of the Civil War Dance Foundation. When the Society held its first Harrisburg Civil War Exposition in conjunction with Harrisburg Area Community College in 1995, we needed a civilian activity as a counterpoint to all of the military displays and demonstrations.

Fortunately, Dr. Thomas Foster had been teaching Civil War dance classes for HACC and several Maryland colleges and offered to put together a troupe to provide a performance. The dance demonstration was a hit, especially the audience participation portion that drew dozens out onto the dance floor to learn a simple dance. After the Expo, Dr. Foster organized the Ensemble to present dance demonstrations and conduct balls.

The group has since grown to over 50 dancers and now conducts three dozen balls, dance demonstrations and classes each year throughout the mid Atlantic region. The Ensemble has conducted dance classes at part of the Camp Curtin Historical Society's educational outreach and they have presented many dance demonstrations and balls for our living history programs. In 2008, the group expanded its programs and reorganized as the Civil War Dance Foundation. The Victorian Dance Ensemble name is still used by the performing troupe. In addition to dancing, the CWDF also offers

displays of jewelry and accessories, newspapers about dancing, and photographic items as part of its programs. One of the most popular activities is the Victorian/Civil War clothing try-on.

The VDE is deeply committed to supporting historic preservation and education and has held fundraising balls and dance classes for numerous preservation projects. Through 2008, the Ensemble has directly donated more than \$23,000 from its own treasury to various historical preservation and education causes. The VDE was one of the main donors to Camp Curtin's Jenkins Monument Fund and its name appears on the back of the monument.

Camp Curtin recently offered a bus trip on January 31 to Washington to see the Ensemble perform at the American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery, located in the former U. S. Patent Office Building, site of Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural ball in 1865. The Ensemble presented three dance demonstrations to standing room only crowds in the courtyard. Each program concluded with an audience participation dance that has become a trademark of the group. Museum visitors of all ages were enticed onto the dance floor and learned a simple dance from the Civil War.

To learn more about the Victorian Dance Ensemble and the Civil War Dance Foundation and upcoming events, visit their website at www.CivilWarDance.org.

**The Camp Curtin Historical Society and
the National Civil War Museum**
proudly present



Jeffrey Wert
speaking on his new book

*Cavalryman of the Lost Cause
A Biography of J. E. B. Stuart*

Join us for this fascinating talk at
2:00PM, Sunday, April 19, 2009
at the National Civil War Museum
1 Lincoln Circle in Reservoir Park, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

*This program is free and open to the public so bring a friend.
Refreshments and social hour will follow the presentation.*

*Copies of this and Jeff's other books will be
available for purchase and autographing.*

For directions or information, telephone 717-732-5330
(Email campcurtin1861@aol.com)