



HARPERS FERRY

CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

PO BOX 1079, HARPERS FERRY, WV 25425

Vol. 28 March 2009 No. 7

DATE: Wednesday, March 11th, 2009

TIME: 7:00 PM - CWRT Members Dinner
(Dinner Reservations Required)

8:00 Speaker's Presentation and Book Raffle
(Open to the Public)

PLACE: Camp Hill Methodist Church, Harpers Ferry, WV

SPEAKER: Ronald S. Coddington

SUBJECT: Real Soldiers: A Survey of the Civil War
Generation

The Subject:

Ronald S. Coddington will present a statistical snapshot of more than one hundred volunteer soldiers who served in the Union and Confederate armies. These findings will help to better understand and appreciate the men who put aside personal pursuits to fight for their country during our greatest national crisis.

The Speaker:

While other kids in his Middlesex, New Jersey neighborhood were collecting baseball cards, fourteen-year-old Ron Coddington was browsing flea markets looking for old photographs. Little did he realize after he purchased his first photo in 1977 that collecting historic images would become a lifelong pursuit. He originally collected various formats of vernacular photography dating from the 1840s to the 1890s. Over time, he focused his collection on Civil War era cartes de visite, a paper format popular during the 1860s. In 2001, he began writing Faces of War, a regular column in the Civil War News. Each month, Ron profiles a soldier, each illustrated with an original, wartime carte de visite photograph. His subjects are enlisted men and non-commissioned officers, and officers below the rank of colonel. Ron believes that appreciating the role of the volunteer soldier is key to understanding America's greatest conflict. He writes, "The history of the Civil War is the stories of its soldiers."

A collection of these columns became part of Ron's first book, *Faces of the Civil War: An Album of Union Soldiers and Their Stories* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004). A companion volume, *Faces of the Confederacy: An Album of Southern Soldiers and Their Stories*, also published by Johns Hopkins, was published in 2008.

Ron has participated as a speaker at numerous Civil War-related events, and at meetings for round tables and other organizations.

A 1985 graduate of the University of Georgia, Ron lives in Arlington, Virginia, with his wife, Anne, and pugs Missy and Bella. He is currently the art director of *USA TODAY*.

THE MEAL

A family-style meal will be served at 7:00 PM prior to the program. The cost of the meal is \$15.00 per person. Reservations for the meal **must be phoned in no later than Sunday, March 8th**, to Allison Alsdorf, at 304-535-2101 or you can e-mail her at alsdorf@comcast.net

Civil War Heroine Mrs. Bridget "Irish Biddy" Divers

The Heroines of the Great War for the Union, like its heroes, have come from every class of society, and represent every grade in our social scale. Ladies of the highest refinement and social polish have left homes of luxury, and devoted themselves, week after week, and month after month, to daily labor and nightly vigils in the wards of great hospitals. No less praiseworthy and admirable have been the devotion and self-sacrifice of those who were born in less favored circles, and brought with them to the work, if not the elegance of the boudoir, the hearty good will, the vigorous sense, and the unwearied industry of the laboring class.

If the antecedents and manners of Bridget Divers, whom Sheridan's men commonly knew as "Irish Biddy," were not those of what the world calls "a lady," she proved herself possessed of the heart of a true, brave, loyal, and unselfish woman, who devoted herself, from the beginning to the end of the war, to the good of the soldier, with such uncalculating generosity, that she deserves and enjoys the grateful remembrance and the unfeigned respect of every patriot who saw anything of her admirable labor.

In the commencement of the war, she went out with the First Michigan cavalry, and through the war continued to act with and for that organization. But as she became familiar with the army, and well known in it, she extended her labors so as to reach the wants of the brigade, and even the division to which the First Michigan belonged. She knew every man in the regiment, and could speak of his character, his wants, his sufferings, and the facts of his military record. Her care and kindness extended to the moral and religious wants, as well as the health, of the men of her regiment, as she always called it. In the absence of the chaplain she came to the Christian Commission for books and papers for the men, saying that she was the acting chaplain, and appearing to take a very deep interest in the moral and religious well-being of them all. It made no difference to her in what capacity she acted, or what she did, so be it was necessary for the good of the men.

Acting now as vivandière or daughter of the regiment, now as nurse, hospital steward, ward master, and some times as surgeon, she was invaluable in each capacity. From her long experience with wounds and disease, her judgment came to be excellent, and her practical skill equal often to that of a physician. In drawing various supplies from the Sanitary and Christian Commission she showed good judgment, and knew just what the men really wanted, never encouraging waste or recklessness in distribution, while she was really very kind and tender-hearted. Her whole soul was in the work of aiding and sustaining the soldier. No day was too stormy or too cold to check her in an errand of mercy. She overcame all obstacles, and battled successfully with all sorts of rebuffs and discouragements in the prosecution of her duties.

When the Christian Commission received letters from home, which was very frequently the case, inquiring for a soldier, if the man was believed to be even in the division to which she was attached, Bridget was the first person to whom application was made. If it was in "her brigade," as she called it, she could tell all about him. If in the division, she was more likely to know than the commanding officer or the adjutant, and could generally give all the desired information. Her memory of names and places was truly wonderful.

When the brigade was in active service she was with it in the field, and shared all its dangers. She was a fearless and skilful rider, and as brave as the bravest under fire. In actual battle she had two or three horses killed under her, and in the course of the war lost eight or ten in various ways.

In the battle of Cedar Creek she found herself at one time cut off and surrounded by the enemy, but managed, by an adroit movement, to escape capture.

As to making something out of the war, she was utterly indifferent to that. At one time a purse of some three hundred dollars was made up and presented to her; but in a few weeks the most of it was gone, having been expended in various purchases for the comfort of her boys. Any money given to her was sure to find its way back again into the regiment, as she would expend it for the benefit of some sick, or wounded, or unfortunate man, or for the purchase of hospital supplies.

Her personal appearance was not prepossessing or attractive. Sleeping on the ground like a soldier, and enduring hard ships like the rest, her face became browned by exposure, and her figure grew athletic by constant exercise and life in the open air. But the heart that beat under her plain cassock was as full of womanly tenderness as that of any

princess in purple velvet; and, though her hand was strong and brown, it was as ready to do an act of generous kindness as that of Florence Nightingale herself. (Excerpted from <http://www.civilwar.com/union-women/>)