

# The Bugle

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



Winter 2014  
Volume 24, Number 4



*Union Army Revolvers*

*"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

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### Dues are Due

Please check your envelope. If it has "Exp Dec 2014" your membership is about to expire. We hope that all of you will renew your dues and join us in helping to spread the word about Civil War preservation, commemoration and education. Please return the enclosed reenlistment form and, if possible, join at a higher level. Remember, any donation above the basic recruit level of \$15.00 is tax deductible!

### License Plate Available

You can show your support for Gettysburg Preservation on your car! The license plate approved earlier this year is now available. The plate will cost an additional \$54 over the usual registration and \$23 of that fee will be allocated to a special fund for cleaning, repair and restoration of Pennsylvania monuments at Gettysburg. For information and an application form, visit [http://www.dmv.state.pa.us/license\\_plates/special\\_fund.shtml](http://www.dmv.state.pa.us/license_plates/special_fund.shtml).



### FREE Civil War Dance Classes

The Victorian Dance Ensemble will conduct Free Civil War Dance Classes at the Penn State Harrisburg Campus, Middletown, Pa., 2:00-4:00PM, Sundays, January 18, February 22, and March 15. Learn the popular formation dances of the 1860s. Partners are encouraged but not required. Families are welcome. Ideal for teachers, reenactors, and historic site docents. The class is free but reservations are required because of limited space. For more information telephone 717-732-5330, or email [info@CivilWarDance.org](mailto:info@CivilWarDance.org). Visit their website at [www.CivilWarDance.org](http://www.CivilWarDance.org).

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#### Cover:

*Three of the Revolvers carried by the Union Army during the early part of the Civil War (left to right): Model 1860 Colt .44 Caliber Army Revolver, Model 1858 Beals Remington .36 Caliber Navy Revolver, and Model 1858 Starr .44 Caliber Double Action Army Revolver.*

## Camp Curtin Historical Society and Civil War Round Table

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# Union Army Revolvers

Handguns were carried in the Civil War in large numbers. All officers were expected to purchase their own, and most enlisted cavalymen and some enlisted artillerymen were issued pistols.

Some infantrymen brought their own from home or purchased them privately, especially early in the war. The style of fighting and the problem of securing ammunition made them impractical for infantry, and they were usually sent home.

Even for the men who had pistols, they were rarely used in battle because of their short range and relatively light hitting power. Most historians believe handguns caused a low percentage of the casualties. About the only time they could be used effectively was when the two sides closed for hand-to-hand combat, which was infrequent, in small numbers, and for short periods of time.

The typical pistol of the Civil War is referred to as a “Cap and Ball” revolver. At the time, “ball” meant bullet and most were actually conical shaped rather than round. A revolver has a revolving cylinder that usually has six chambers for bullets. Originally, loose gunpowder was poured into the chamber and a bullet added. By the time of the Civil War, paper tubes were attached to bullets to create a single piece cartridge (right). The cartridges would be pushed into the chambers from the front of the cylinder. A loading lever under the barrel would be pulled down and a plunger would seat the cartridge in the chamber. Then, a small percussion cap would be placed on the nipple.

This process would have to be repeated for each chamber. Thus, unless there was a long lull in a battle, it was unlikely that a revolver would be reloaded. There is no reliable documentation that soldiers carried extra pre-loaded cylinders and interchanged the cylinders to reload their weapon. To fire the gun, the hammer had to be pulled back and the trigger squeezed. This is known as a single action revolver.



Samuel Colt (left) invented the first practical revolver in 1836. His first models were known as Patersons because they were manufactured in a factory in Paterson, New Jersey. Although Colt did make some sales to the military, the pistols were somewhat delicate for heavy field use. Ultimately, Colt’s business failed and he ceased production in 1842.

With the coming of the Mexican War, however, Colt developed a more rugged model with the help of Captain Samuel Walker of the U.S. Mounted Rifle Regiment. In 1847, Colt received an order from the U.S. Army for 1,000 Walker model revolvers, and he arranged for Eli Whitney’s factory to make the guns. They proved to be a great improvement in firearms technology and the beginning of a long relationship between Colt and the Army.

With the success of the Walker model, Colt established his own factory at Hartford, Connecticut, and began production of an improved model that he called the “Dragoon” revolver. The dragoons were the then current name of the Army’s cavalry units, and Colt thought that applying that name to the pistol would help in its marketing to the general public. He would continue using military names to his subsequent models, and other manufacturers would adopt the same practice.



**Colt Model 1848 Dragoon**

Over 20,000 Dragoon revolvers were made between 1847 and 1860. It was a six-shot, single action, percussion cap ignited, .44 caliber weapon.



The Dragoon's one disadvantage was that it was heavy, four pounds, two ounces. Although none were purchased by the U.S. Army during the Civil War, many of these guns that were in state and federal arsenals were used in the Civil War.

In 1851, Colt introduced a new model in .36 caliber that he called the "Navy" revolver. This two pound, ten ounce revolver, with an octagonal barrel, would prove to be one of Colt's most popular products. Like the Dragoon, it was a six-shot, single action, percussion cap ignited weapon. It remained in production until 1873 and over 215,000 were made.



**Colt Model 1851 Navy**

In 1855 the U.S. Army created two new cavalry regiments and they were issued the 1851 Colt Navy. Many officers, including Robert E. Lee, also purchased this pistol in the pre-war years. The design was so popular that several Confederate manufacturers made copies during the Civil War.

In 1860, Colt introduced the new .44 caliber Army Model with a round barrel. This would become the most common revolver of the Civil War with the U.S. Army buying over 177,000 between June 1861 and November 1863. Prices started at \$25 per gun and eventually dropped to \$14 because of increased production and competition with Remington.



**Colt Model 1860 Army**

The Remington family of Ilion, New York, had been making firearms since 1816, primarily hunting rifles and contract versions of military muskets. In 1858, Remington introduced a new revolver designed by Fordyce Beals. It was made in .36 caliber and .44 caliber; following Colt's designations, they were called "Navy" and "Army" models. They had a top strap over the cylinder, unlike the open topped Colts. Being new to the pistol business, the Remington revolvers were slow to be accepted. The weapon was redesigned slightly in 1861 and again in 1863.



**Beals Remington Model 1858**

By mid-1863, the U.S. Army had purchased only about 18,000 Remingtons. By the fall of 1863, however, the weapon had proved its reliability and the price was only \$12.00 each, \$2.00 less than the Colt. Orders for Remingtons drastically increased and 110,000 more would be procured by the end of the war, making it the second most common handgun used by the U.S. Army.

The third most common revolvers used by the U.S. Army were two models made by the Starr Arms Company of New York.



**Starr Model 1858 - Double Action**

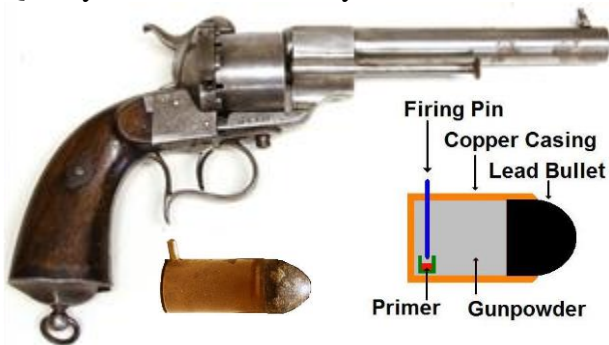
The Model 1858 was made in both .36 Caliber (Navy Model) and .44 caliber (Army Model). It was unique in that it was a double action revolver. The hammer did not need to be cocked before firing. Squeezing the trigger cocked the hammer, rotated the cylinder, and fired the pistol. This system would become common to post-war

revolvers and continues to modern times. At the time of the Civil War it was a great innovation but it was not popular with the troops. About 23,000 of these weapons were purchased early in the war at \$20.00 each. With Colt and Remington producing pistols for less, Starr decided to simplify its design and created a new single action model in 1863. It was made only in the .44 caliber "Army" version. At \$12.00 each, they sold 25,000 to the U.S. Army.



**Starr Model 1863 Single Action**

Early in the war, the U.S. Army sent agents to Europe to purchase all types of weapons because Northern industry has not yet ramped up production to meet the huge needs of the military. The guns of all types came from such countries as England, France, Austria, Belgium, and Prussia. Quality varied considerably.



**LeFauchaux Pinfire**

The largest foreign pistol purchase was 13,000 LeFauchaux 12mm (approximately .47 caliber) revolvers. Made in Paris, France, these pistols used a different type of cartridge, called a pinfire. A pin protruded from a copper case and it was struck by the pistol's hammer, which drove the pin into a primer inside the cartridge and fired the gun. This was the only internally primed cartridge handgun purchased by the U.S. Army during the Civil War.

Perhaps the strangest looking pistol of the Civil War was the .36 caliber Savage-North Navy Revolver. About 11,000 were bought early in the war. It required two fingers to operate. The middle finger fit in the lower ring and cocked the hammer; the index finger squeezed the trigger. The piece was not well balanced and unwieldy in the field. It was never popular with the troops, and most were replaced with other weapons when the opportunity arose.



**Savage-North Navy Revolver**

Smith and Wesson introduced one of the most technologically advanced weapons in 1861. Designated the No. 2 Army Revolver, it used a .32 caliber rimfire metallic cartridge, like today's ammunition. It was never adopted by the U.S. Army because of its small caliber and the fact that it required specialized ammunition. Some states bought them for their troops, and some officers bought it for their sidearm. Over 25,000 were made during the war and many of these were probably carried into combat.



**Smith & Wesson No. 2 Army Revolver**

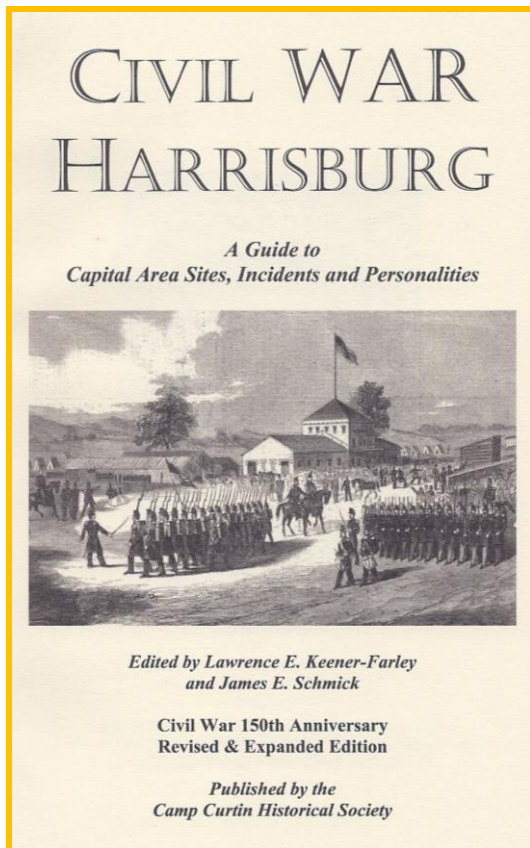
Like most wars, the Civil War was a time of innovation and every inventor seemed to have a different idea for the ideal design for a handgun. The U.S. Army purchased numerous other pistols in smaller quantities during the Civil War in an attempt to fill a need, to please politicians with a gun factory in their district, and to determine which would be best for field service. Ultimately, the Colt, Remington, and Starr revolvers would dominate the field.

# Civil War Harrisburg

**A Guide to Capital Area Sites, Incidents and Personalities**

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**To order by mail, make your check for \$15.00 payable to  
“Camp Curtin Historical Society” and mail to:**

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**Harrisburg, PA 17110**

## GNMP Free Winter Lectures Series – The War in 1865 and Beyond

Gettysburg National Military Park will be offering a series of lectures that touch on many different aspects of the Civil War. Programs will be held on Saturdays and Sundays at 1:30PM in the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center. Check the Park website for complete descriptions of the lectures and any updates: [www.nps.gov/gett](http://www.nps.gov/gett).



Saturday, January 3

### **Lee Comes Home from War – 1865 to 1870**

*Matt Atkinson, GNMP Ranger*

Sunday, January 4

### **“Not Yet!” – Longstreet at Appomattox**

*Karlton Smith, GNMP Ranger*

Saturday, January 10

### **Famous Utterances on the Road to Appomattox: The Importance of Rhetoric and Language in the War’s Final Hours**

*Troy Harman, GNMP Ranger*

Sunday, January 11

### **“It was, indeed, a scene of unsurpassed grandeur and majesty” An Audio-Visual Presentation of the National Park Service’s Coverage of the 150th Anniversary of the American Civil War**

*Jason Martz, Visual Information Specialist, Northeast Region, NPS*

Saturday, January 17

### **Rocking the Cradle of the Confederacy: Sherman in South Carolina, 1865**

*Bertram Barnett, GNMP Ranger*

Sunday, January 18

### **The Civil War: A Waypoint in Military History**

*William Hewitt, GNMP Ranger*

Saturday, January 24

### **What Gettysburg Meant: Civil War Veterans Reflect on America’s Most Famous Battle**

*Christopher Gwinn, GNMP Ranger*

Sunday, January 25

### **If These Things Could Talk – 1865**

*Tom Holbrook, GNMP Ranger*

Saturday, January 31

### **The Final Fourteen Days of Father Abraham**

*Chuck Teague, GNMP Ranger*

Sunday, February 1

### **“My God! Has the army been dissolved?”**

### **The Battles at Sailor’s Creek, April 6, 1865**

*John Heiser, GNMP Ranger*

Saturday, February 7

### **Going Back: Returning to Fields of Glory**

*Beth Parnicza, Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park*

Sunday, February 8

### **Going Home: Grand Review and Demobilization**

*John Hoptak, GNMP Ranger*

Saturday, February 14

### **“A Peculiar Institution”**

### **A Century of Licensed Guiding at the GNMP**

*Frederick Hawthorne, Licensed Battlefield Guide*

Sunday, February 15

### **“Martyrs of the Race Course”**

### **The Forgotten Decoration Day**

*Dan Welch, Gettysburg Foundation*

Saturday, February 21

### **“Injustice must cease before peace can prevail”**

### **Frederick Douglass: The Post-Civil War Years**

*Mark Maloy, Frederick Douglass Historic Site*

Sunday, February 22

### **From the Battlefield to the White House**

### **Civil War Careers of Post-Civil War Presidents**

*Daniel Vermilya, Antietam National Battlefield*

Saturday, February 28

### **Monuments that Place Gettysburg in the Greater Context of the War**

*Troy Harman, GNMP Ranger*

Sunday, March 1

### **Film Presentation: Buster Keaton in *The General***

Introduction and commentary by

*Evangelina Rubalcava, GNMP Ranger*

Saturday, March 7

### **To the Brink of Collapse: The Final Campaign of the Army of Tennessee**

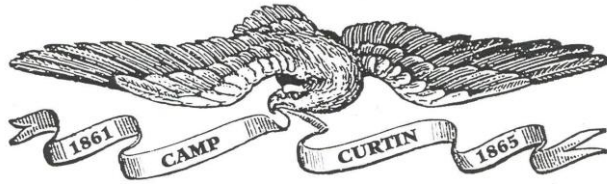
*Philip Brown, Guilford Courthouse National Park*

Sunday, March 8

### **The Closing Scenes: Admiral David G. Farragut and the End of the Civil War**

*Karlton Smith, GNMP Ranger*





*Camp Curtin Historical Society  
presents*

**Keith Foote**

*speaking on*

**"Mark the Lines of Your Weary Marches"**

**The Travels and Travails of Cooper's Battery B,  
First Pennsylvania Light Artillery**

**2:00PM, Sunday, February 8th**

*at the*

***Camp Curtin Memorial-Mitchell United Methodist Church  
2221 North Sixth Street  
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania***

Keith Foote will be speaking on his new book about Cooper's Battery. The battery was part of the Pennsylvania Reserve Volunteer Corps, organized at Camp Curtin in 1861.

It fought in most of the major battles in the east, including the Peninsula Campaign, Second Bull Run, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Siege of Petersburg, and Appomattox. Keith's talk will follow the route of the battery as it helps the Army of the Potomac win ultimate victory.

Keith Foote is a long time member of Cooper's Battery B's reenacting unit and a member of the Victorian Dance Ensemble. His book began as a journey to learn more about the battery that he portrays.

**This presentation is free and open to the public. Bring a friend.**

**The program will be preceded by the Camp Curtin Historical Society's  
annual meeting, including presentation of reports and elections.**

**For information call 717-732-5115 or email [genjenkins@aol.com](mailto:genjenkins@aol.com).**