



# General Orders

## Rains' Regiment

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2010

[www.houstoncivilwar.com](http://www.houstoncivilwar.com)

**OCTOBER 2010 MEETING**  
**Thursday, October 21, 2010**

**The Briar Club**  
**2603 Timmons Lane @ Westheimer**  
**6:00 Cash Bar**  
**7:00 Dinner & Meeting**

**E-Mail Reservation is Preferred;**  
at [drzuckero@sbcglobal.net](mailto:drzuckero@sbcglobal.net)  
or call Don Zuckero at (281) 479-1232  
by 6 PM on Monday Oct. 18, 2010  
**Dinner \$33; Lecture Only \$5**

**Reservations are required for Lecture Only!**

## The HCWRT PRESENTS

### **“John Brown’s Trial”**

For our October 2010 meeting, the Houston Civil War Round Table presents Brian McGinty and his account of John Brown’s Trial.

John Brown’s trial for murder, treason, and fomenting a slave rebellion followed close on the heels of his abortive Harper’s Ferry Raid. Opening in nearby Charles Town on October 26, 1859, the trial received massive media attention and raised important legal issues. Yet it consumed only four days of the court’s time and ended with a quick verdict of guilty and a sentence of death by hanging. Judged by its consequences, the trial was the most important in American history. It transformed Brown’s public image from that of a violent fanatic into that of an eloquent and courageous crusader for the abolition of slavery. It raised the chorus of Southern demands for secession and inspired many Northerners to support Brown’s crusade for human freedom. More than his Harpers Ferry raid, Brown’s trial contributed to the onset of the Civil War just a year later, and to the abolition of slavery that quickly followed the war’s conclusion.

## About Our Speaker: Brian McGinty

Brian McGinty is a lawyer and writer with a special interest in American history. He received an A.B. in history at the University of California in Berkeley and a J.D. from Boalt Hall, the law school at the same university. He practiced law in the state and federal courts of California, while beginning a long career of freelance writing. He has been an editor and a writer for a large national legal publisher, where he participated in writing and editing practice books for lawyers all over the country. As a freelance writer, he has published seven books and more than 150 articles in popular magazines and scholarly journals.



His last two books have related to the Civil War. Lincoln and the Court, published by Harvard University Press in 2008, discusses Abraham Lincoln’s difficult relations with the Supreme Court during the Civil War. The Washington Post has called it a “fascinating book.” John Brown’s Trial, published by Harvard in 2009, describes the historic trial that took place in Charles Town, Virginia (now West Virginia), in 1859. A reviewer has called it “an important book on an important subject.” Brian became interested in Brown’s trial when he discovered that it had never been the subject of a full-length, fully-researched book. His examination of the trial remedies what he believes to have been undeserved neglect, for he considers it one of the most important events in American history - certainly one of the key events that led up to the Civil War. Brian now lives in Arizona.

## COMMANDER'S CORNER

*By David Rains*

I was pleased with the good attendance for the first meeting in September. Everyone who attended the meeting was treated to a good overview of the Army of the Potomac presented by Bill Bergen from UVA. I find it interesting to see how the politics and personalities played such significant roles in determination of major decisions particularly in the selection of the Army's corps commanders. Also interesting is how Grant seemingly made better decisions in picking his team players during the war than he did later in his presidency.

I am looking forward to the October 21 meeting with Brian McGinty. He has received significant recognition in reviewing his "John Brown's Trial" book at a special presentation at the National Archives in Washington D.C. and also for a nationally televised audience on CSPAN. We are indeed fortunate to have Brian join us for this month's meeting.



## OCTOBER BOOK RAFFLE

*by Donnie Stowe*

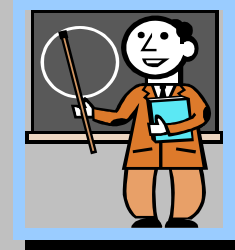
I certainly enjoyed seeing everyone at our September meeting and believe it was a good start for the new season. For our October meeting the book raffle begins with ***Ulysses S. Grant - Personal Memoirs***, by Caleb Carr, Series Editor and donated by Scott Shuster. Next up is a donated volume from Norm Lewis - ***Confederate Crackers and Cavaliers*** by Grady McWhiney. Third in the raffle is ***Tennessee's Radical Army - The State Guard and it's Role in Reconstruction 1867-1869*** by Ben H Severance - the donor is unknown. The final selection is the well-known and popular ***Battle Cry Of Freedom*** by James M. McPherson. Mr. McPherson was and may still be the Edwards Professor of American History at Princeton University.

I wish to thank the several members that brought in some great new selections to add to our raffle inventory. Members are always encouraged to donate some of their well-read books or a small monetary donation for purchase of books to continue this valuable support to the HCWRT Raffle.

## OCTOBER QUIZ

*By Jim Godlove*

The major backers for John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry were known as the "Secret Six". One of these men later became colonel of the First South Carolina Volunteers (Union). He wrote of his war experiences in *Army Life in a Black Regiment*.



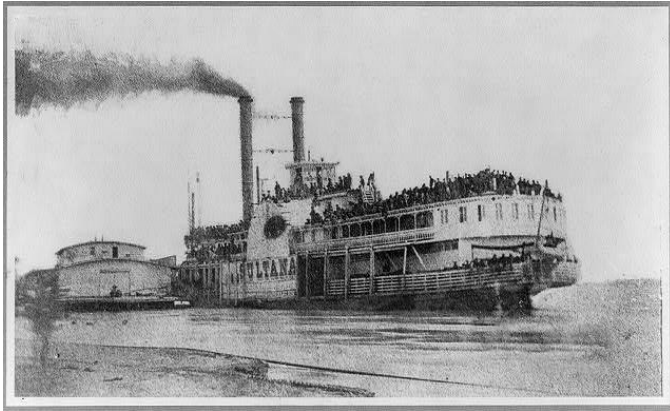
Who was this New Englander who later became the first editor of the poet, Emily Dickinson?

## HCWRT 2010-2011 SPEAKERS CAMPAIGN

Oct 21, 2010	Brian McGinty <i>John Brown's Trial</i>
Nov 18, 2010	Troy Banzhaf <i>Pea Ridge Battle</i>
Dec 16, 2010	Donald Jones <i>Irish Brigade</i>
Jan 21, 2011	Ed Bearss <i>Receding Tide: Vicksburg &amp; Gettysburg</i>
Feb 17, 2011	Ed Bonekemper <i>Six Turning Points of War</i>
Mar 17, 2011	To Be Announced
Apr 21, 2011	Don Frazier To Be Announced
May 19, 2011	To Be Announced

# The ill-fated SS Sultana

## By Robert E. Taylor



On April 27th 1865 SS Sultana, a large Mississippi River steam paddle wheeler was destroyed in an explosion resulting in the greatest maritime disaster in U. S. history with an estimated 1,800 of the 2,400 passengers and crew on board being killed.

The ship exploded and sank in flames near Memphis after three of her four boilers exploded. At the time, the size of the disaster was overshadowed by the assassination of President Lincoln and the closing days of the War Between the States.

The wooden steamship was constructed in 1863 and intended for the lower Mississippi cotton trade. Weighing 1,719 tons, it normally carried a crew of 85. For two years, the Sultana ran a regular route between St Louis and New Orleans and was frequently commissioned by the U.S. War Department to carry troops.

Of all the people responsible for overloading the Sultana, the ship's Master **Captain J. Cass Mason** and Chief Quartermaster **Lt Colonel Ruben Hatch** were obviously guilty of greed and negligence resulting in such massive loss of life. Both were influenced by the payment of \$10.00 per officer and \$5.00 per enlisted man to ensure as many as possible, some 2,400 were crammed on board a ship designed to carry a maximum of 376 passengers. In the Quartermaster's office Captain Mason had earlier let everyone know, in no uncertain terms, that they were to pack on a full load of parolees. The ship is seen here about to leave Vicksburg with her decks dramatically overcrowded.

Both prime suspects, they were not only ignored but whitewashed at the expense of a man whose only crime was to dispatch as many former prisoners from Cahaba and Andersonville as possible and loading them on a train for the Vicksburg docks. **Captain Frederick Speed** had his counting of prisoners thrown out when another officer refused to hold roll calls until all were loaded aboard ships and for this reason the exact number can never be known, the roll was lost with the ship. Because Speed was in charge of repatriating the prisoners, he was held responsible for sending too many to be loaded, rather than holding Mason and Hatch to account for actually putting them all on board. Hatch had powerful friends in Washington including Abraham Lincoln that for the time freed him from

accountability. As scapegoat Frederick Speed found himself before a court martial and after three trials, including that held in the Vicksburg courthouse was found guilty; however the verdict was eventually overturned by a US army Judge Advocate General. The man who should have been in court was J. Cass Mason, master of the ill-fated vessel.

Officially the cause of the *Sultana* disaster was determined, by the Vicksburg court, to be mismanagement of water levels in boilers, made worse by heavy careening as the steamer navigated tight bends in the Mississippi against a heavy flow of water. The *Sultana* was severely overcrowded and top heavy during her voyage north to Cairo in Illinois and listed severely to one side, then the other. The *Sultana's* four boilers were interconnected and mounted side-by-side, so that if the ship tipped sideways, water would tend to run out of the highest boiler. With the fires still going against an empty boiler, the scene was set for disaster as it created hot spots. When the ship tipped the other way, water rushing back into an empty overheated boiler would flash instantly to steam, creating a sudden surge in pressure. Careening could have been minimized and the disaster avoided by maintaining high water levels in the boilers. The official inquiry found that *Sultana's* boilers exploded due to the combined effects of careening, low water level, and a faulty repair to a leaky boiler made a few days earlier.

Mason played yet another role in the ship's demise, having been warned by the tradesman, a Mr. Taylor, that the patch up job was insufficient and indeed dangerous, Mason ignored Taylor in order to take the passengers ahead of another steamer waiting nearby. He was governed only by money to be gained from packing them all on.

In 1888, St. Louis resident William Streeter claimed his former business partner, Robert Loudon, made a deathbed confession of having sabotaged the *Sultana* with a coal torpedo. Coal torpedoes were basically an iron lump, cast to look like coal, with an explosive charge in the centre. When covered with coal dust they were very difficult if not impossible to identify. A former Confederate agent and saboteur, Loudon operated in and around St. Louis and had the opportunity and motive to attack *Sultana*. He even had access to the means, Thomas Edgeworth Courtenay, inventor of the coal torpedo, was former resident of St. Louis and involved in similar acts of sabotage against Union shipping interests. Supporting Loudon's claim are eyewitness reports that a piece of artillery shell was observed in the wreckage. Loudon's claim remains hotly debated with many historians preferring to support the official explanation, faulty boilers.



Captain J. Cass Mason



Captain Frederick Speed

## Brothers in Delta Kappa Epsilon

Upon a southern battlefield the twilight shadows fall.  
The clash and roar are ended, and the evening bugles call.  
The wearied hosts are resting where the ground is stained with red,  
And o'er the plain between them lie the wounded and the dead.

And out upon the sodden field, where the armies fought all day,  
There came a group of soldiers who wore the rebel gray.  
But peaceful was their mission upon the darkened plain:  
They came to save their wounded and lay at rest the slain.

And tenderly their hands performed the work they had to do,  
And one among them paused beside a wounded boy in blue,  
A Northern lad, with curly hair and eyes of softest brown,  
Whose coat of blue was red with blood that trickled slowly down.

A bullet hole was in his breast, and there alone he lay  
At night upon the battle-field, and moaned his life away.  
The rebel paused beside him, and in the lantern's light  
He saw upon the soldier's breast a fair familiar sight.

It was the pin of *D K E*, the diamond, stars and scroll,  
The emblem of a brotherhood that bound them soul to soul.  
He raised his hand and quickly tore his coat of gray apart,  
And showed the wounded soldier a Deke pin o'er his heart.

Then close beside the Yankee dropped the rebel to his knee,  
And their hands were clasped together in the grip of *D K E*.  
"I'm from Theta," said the Yankee, and he tried to raise his head;  
"I'm from Psi, in Alabama," were the words the rebel said.

"Brothers from the heart forever" – nothing more was left to say,  
Though one was clad in Northern blue and one in Southern gray.  
But the Northern lad was dying; his voice was faint at best  
As he murmured out his messages to "mother and the rest."

And as the rebel soothed him, with his head upon his knee,  
He heard him whisper "Bowdoin," and "Dear old *D K E*."

And he bandaged up the bosom that was torn by rebel shot;  
And bathed the brow with water where the fever fires were hot;  
And kissed him for his mother, and breathed a gentle prayer  
As the angel's wings were fluttering above them in the air.

And to a lonely country home, far in the heart of Maine,  
A letter soon was carried from that Southern battle plain.  
It told about the conflict, and how he bravely fell  
Who was the son and brother in that home beloved so well;

It told the simple story of the night when he had died –  
All written by the rebel Deke whom God sent to his side.  
And when it all was written, the writer sent within  
A little lock of curly hair and a battered diamond pin.

And thirty years have passed away, but these simple relics are  
Of all a mother treasures dear the dearest still by far.  
A simple tale and simply told, but true; and I thought it might  
Well thrill the hearts of loyal Dekes, so I tell it here tonight.

The Northern soldier's name is found on Bowdoin's honor-roll;  
And the names of both are blazoned fair on Delta Kappa's scroll.  
God bless our noble brotherhood; its past is sweet to hear,  
Its grandeur and its glory grow with each succeeding year;  
And the story of its heroes shall an inspiration be  
To us who proudly wear to-day the pin of *D K E*.

*The story told in the previous verses is a true incident of the Civil War. The Northern soldier was Lieutenant Edwin S. Rogers of the 31st Maine Regt. Vols. He was a native of Patten, Me., and entered Bowdoin College in the Class of '65, becoming at once a member of D K E. When a Junior he enlisted in the Union army, and at Cold Harbor, June 8, 1864, received a wound from which he died a few hours later. The name of the Southern Deke is unknown.*

*Submitted by Philip Brown.*



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