





The Railsplitter is a publication of the Department of Illinois, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW).

For more information about the Department, visit our Website:

<https://www.suvcwil.org/>.

Our Facebook page is [here](#).

More information about the SUVCW and becoming a member is here:

www.suvcw.org/.

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Commander's Corner

By Michael Zafran

Department Commander

The Department of Illinois has been busy this spring, both before and after the 143rd Annual Encampment held May 2 at the GAR Hall and Military Museum in Aurora, Illinois. We were privileged to have JVC-in-Chief Robert Payne as our installing officer. It is an honor to serve my second term as your Commander.

As our Commander-in-Chief directed, the Department of Illinois celebrated America 250 with Memorial Day ceremonies in most camps. Highlights included cemetery remembrances with the Bronzeville Historical Society in Chicago, honoring three of the many Civil War Veterans buried there; the 19th annual ceremony at Jewell Grove Cemetery in Wheaton, Illinois; and ceremonies at Oakwood Cemetery in Joliet, Illinois and West Aurora Cemetery in Aurora. The 25th annual ceremony at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood, Illinois was a great success. Our camps were represented at these and other ceremonies throughout the state.

Civil War school presentations were made for grade school and high school students, as well as for the general public.



I was surprised at how even second graders were engaged by the presentation given the day after Memorial Day.

The fifth annual Flag Day ceremony in

Palatine was again well attended, with six camps participating.

We took part in 4th of July parades throughout Illinois: Aurora, Belleville, Oak Lawn, Niles, Skokie, Hinsdale, Waukegan, and Highland Park. Many JROTC and ROTC awards were presented throughout the state.

The grand opening ceremony of the Chicagoland Veterans Campus Military Museum was a tremendous success, with many brothers from various camps in attendance.

Since our last newsletter, I have attended and participated in 19 ceremonies and other historical events.

Our Midterm Encampment will be held Oct. 10 at the Rockford Veterans Memorial Hall and Museum. Details to follow.

Brothers, keep up the great work of the Order.



Chaplain's Corner

By Jerome Kowalski

Chaplain

There is an ancient curse - "May you live in interesting times."

Let me tell you, brothers and sisters, that we indeed do live in "interesting times." Between the possibility of nuclear war, riots over government agencies, looting, extreme heat, heavy rains, disease, fires, political hatred and personal selfishness, these are just the tip of the melting iceberg.

But I have an answer - Jesus, prayer and kindness to others.

If you agree with me, just say amen.

In Fraternity, Charity and Loyalty.

Chaplain Jerry



A Proclamation Congratulations on our 250th Anniversary

By Kevin P. Tucker
Commander-in-chief
Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War

KNOW YOU BY THESE PRESENTS

WHEREAS, 250 years ago to this year, Founding Father Thomas Jefferson penned the Declaration of Independence, America's gateway document to American Independence; and

WHEREAS, 250 years ago on July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was ratified, signed and read out to the nation at the United States Congress; and

WHEREAS, George Washington founded the Continental Army - the United States Army, on June 14, 1775, more than a year before the Declaration of Independence; and

WHEREAS, only months later under George Washington, the United States Navy Oct. 13, 1775, and United States Marine Corps Nov. 10, 1775, were formed; and

WHEREAS, 78 years after the American Revolution ended, in 1861, a devastating "War of the Rebellion" - the American Civil

War, raged for 4 years, until 1865; and

WHEREAS, in defending the Republic and Freedom, the Union soldier sacrificed livelihoods, family, with many ultimately giving the last full measure of devotion to the nation; and

WHEREAS, Union forces successfully defended the Republic and Freedom of all peoples of the United States in defeating a rebel Confederacy, PRESERVING the United States; and

WHEREAS, President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation would FREE those enslaved as matters of God-given rights - equality, freedom, rights to self-determination and property; and

WHEREAS, President Abraham Lincoln was fondly termed America's "SAVIOR," and the Boys in Blue, her "DEFENDERS;" and

WHEREAS, for 250 years, in preserving the United States, our nation has held the global role as the PROTECTOR of Freedom and Democracy around the world; and WHEREAS the Order salutes our Military Personnel of our six branches, our Veter-

ans and their families - then and now, our Public Safety professionals and families, all who fight daily and fought to protect and preserve our freedom and republic; and

WHEREAS, for 250 years, the Declaration of Independence July 4, 1776 is considered the founding date of the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, and therefore as Commander-in-Chief of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, I, Kevin P. Tucker, declare the Spirit of America and the 250th Anniversary of the Signing of the Declaration of Independence is alive and well, that American Freedom and our Republic are strong, that we BLESS our July 4 and nationwide America 250 celebrations marking the founding of the United States of America, and all 250 years of history.

We steadfastly bestow these blessings to our nation as we also faithfully remember and celebrate the Boys in Blue; Union Soldiers who fought to keep our United States ONE nation, under God.

Bless America and God Bless America 250 Celebrations across the USA!



About the SUVCW Department of Illinois

The Department of Illinois, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW) is comprised of 11 camps. To learn more about our camps, [click here](#).

The SUVCW is a fraternal organization dedicated to preserving the history and legacy of heroes who fought to save the Union.

In 1881, the [Grand Army of the Republic \(GAR\)](#) formed the SUVCW as the Sons of Veterans of the United States of America (SV) to carry on its traditions and memory long after the GAR ceased to exist. Membership was open to any man who could prove ancestry to a member of the GAR or to a Veteran eligible for membership in the GAR. In later years,

men who did not have the ancestry to qualify for hereditary membership, but who demonstrated a genuine interest in the Civil War and could subscribe to the purpose and objectives of the SUVCW, were admitted as Associates. This practice continues today.

Many GAR Posts sponsored Camps of the SV. In 1925, the SV name was changed to SUVCW, under which its federal charter was issued in 1954. The SUVCW is legally recognized as the heir to, and representative of, the GAR. It became the SUVCW in name in 1925 and is the legal successor to the GAR, first founded in 1866. Today, the National Organization of the SUVCW, headed by an annually elected Command-

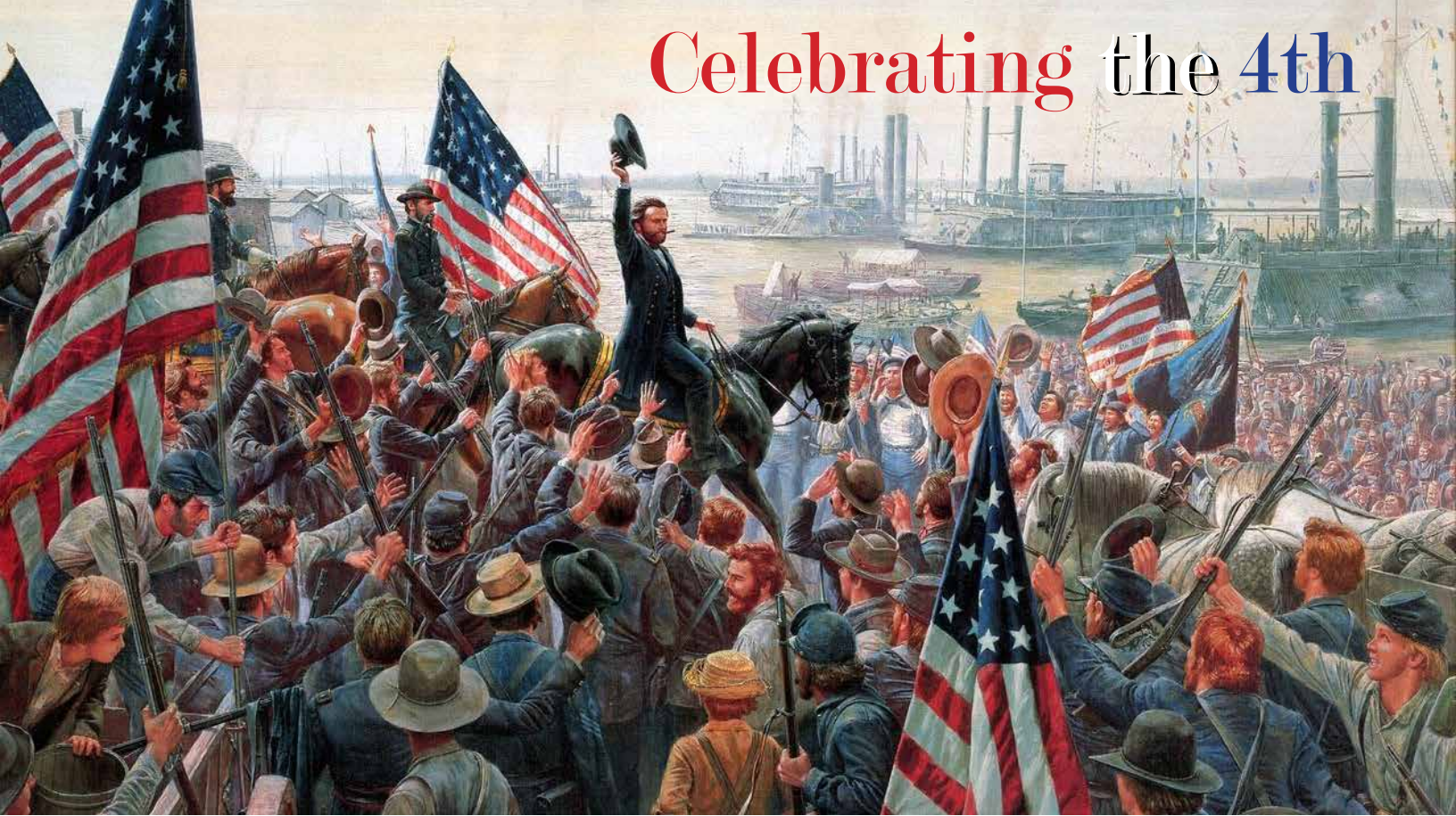
er-in-Chief, oversees the operation of 32 Departments, each consisting of one or more states, a Department-at-Large, a National Membership-at-Large, and over 200 community based camps.

The SUVCW is one of five Allied Orders of the GAR. The other four Orders are: Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic, Woman's Relief Corps, Auxiliary to the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War and Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

If you are not a member and have an interest and/or a direct connection to the civil war or interest in an associate membership, or know of someone else who may, please consider applying for membership and passing the word along to others. [Click here to learn more](#).



Celebrating the 4th



Union forces celebrate the surrender of Confederate forces at Vicksburg, Mississippi on July 4 in this painting by Mort Kunstler.

By Gerald Sonnenberg, Hecker Camp #443
Dept. of Illinois Patriotic Instructor, editor

Unless you live under a rock, you know that our nation turned 250 years old this 4th of July. Out of 195 countries in the world, only 20 to 30 have a longer unbroken continuous statehood or national identity than we do.

On the following pages, you'll see several examples of how the brothers of the Department of Illinois helped America celebrate its birthday, as well as remember our fallen on Memorial Day.

While we reminisce on the many celebrations we participated in or witnessed in other places like Washington D.C., let's consider the celebration the Union had in 1863.

In Pennsylvania,

On July 4, 1863, the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia under Robert E. Lee, limped across the Potomac River towards the relative safety of Virginia after its defeat at Gettysburg. For the three days prior, 71,699 men under Lee's command fought almost 94,000 Union soldiers for control of the land surrounding Gettysburg.

On July 1, when forward elements of the two armies first collided on the ridges northwest of Gettysburg, Lee concentrat-

ed his forces as Union cavalry under Gen. John Buford then gave way. Lee had plenty of reason to be optimistic on the first day of battle as he assaulted two hastily formed and deployed corps of Union infantry that then retreated through the town and regrouped on hills to the south-east. Though his supplies were stretched to the point of breaking, he had hopes of living off the Pennsylvania countryside.

By July 3, after 12,500 Confederates made an assault on the Union center on the third day and were repulsed, General Lee decided to withdraw from the bloody ground at Gettysburg and return to Virginia with the tattered remains of his army.

The Union Army's jubilation on the morning of July 4 was tempered by the torrential rains that soaked the battlefield, the exhaustion they must have felt, and the realization that around them lay nearly 8,000 dead Americans to go along with the 43,000 or so wounded or missing on both sides. Though probably relieved that a fourth day of fighting didn't occur, there was little cause for celebration.

In Mississippi,

A little more than a thousand miles to the southwest, Vicksburg, a bastion of southern power, lay on the east side of the Mississippi River. It provided a natural fortification for protecting navigation on

the river below. The Confederates had placed cannon all along the sharp turn in the river and making Union ships easy targets. The town's importance was voiced by President Abraham Lincoln who said, "Vicksburg is the key, the war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket."

Weeks of siege by U.S. Grant passed as the Union army kept up a steady shelling of the city. The Confederate Army responded, but without much effect. Ammunition, food and morale plummeted.

On July 4, 1863, Union troops celebrated in Vicksburg after Confederate General John Pemberton surrendered the crucial city and some 30,000 soldiers. It also split the Confederacy. Union soldiers reported that the day's celebrations included a "great firing of cannon and anvils." Anvils would be launched using black powder.

The celebrating was one sided. Though relieved that the siege was over, for Vicksburg's citizens, there was no celebration. In fact, the town generally did not celebrate the 4th of July again until 1945 as World War II was ending, and Gen. Dwight Eisenhower came to give a speech. He was well received. Yet, southerners stubbornly still had a say by calling the holiday, the Carnival of the Confederacy until the U.S. bicentennial in 1976.



Around the Department:

Camp activities throughout Illinois

America 250 ceremony

On June 27, Dept. Commander Mike Zafran served as master of ceremonies at the Pleasant Hill Cemetery Event and Picnic in Milton Township Wheaton, Illinois. For the nation's 250th birthday, the community served a lunch, had a band concert, as well as a 12-gun salute at this historic cemetery. Pleasant Hill Cemetery is the final resting place of Veterans from the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War and both World Wars.



Upcoming events

***Department of Illinois Mid Term Encampment - SUVCW** Department of Illinois 143rd Midterm Encampment is scheduled for Oct. 10, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. in Rockford, Illinois at the Veterans Memorial Museum, 311 Main Street. The museum will be open for viewing from noon until 1 p.m.

***Fair St. Clair** - The Col. Friedrich K. Hecker Camp #443 is participating in the St. Clair County Fair in Belleville Thursday July 30 through Saturday Aug. 1. Called Fair St. Clair, this is the first time in 12 years that the county has held a county fair. The camp will have a booth located inside and to the right (west wall) as you enter the main entrance of the Exposition Center. The hours are 10 a.m. until 8 p.m. each day. If you are in the area, please stop by.

***[The 145th National Encampment](#)** of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War and the Allied Orders will be held in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 30-Aug. 2, 2026.

***[Remembrance Day](#)** is Observed each November on the Weekend closest to the Anniversary of President Lincoln giving The Gettysburg Address.



Joining forces

Department of Illinois Camps #2 and #39 joined forces to march in the Aurora, Illinois Independence Day Parade on July 4. Following the parade, the Grand Army of the Republic Military Museum featured a special exhibit. Additional festivities continued throughout the weekend. (Photo courtesy of DC Mike Zafran)



Grand Celebration

On June 6, Hecker Camp #443 brothers (left to right) Greg Zelinske, Gerald Sonnenberg, Justin Ottolini, John Stanton, Richard Piper and Mike Winkler marched in the Gen. John A. Logan Grand Celebration parade recognizing America's 250th birthday and what would have been Gen. Logan's 200th birthday.

This parade in Murphysboro, Illinois was part of a 3-day celebration June 5-7. The event included music, food, reenactors of the Revolution and Civil War, games, and a cannon firing demonstration. *(Photo by Diane Zelinske)*



Cannon salute

Department Commander Michael Zafran provided this photo of a collection of artillery during a 4th of July concert in Naperville, Illinois. The cannon fired during the event. *(Photo by Mike Zafran)*



Colors posted

On July 1, Hecker Camp #443 Past Camp Commander Greg Zelinske and Brother Gerald Sonnenberg presented the colors before a concert at the park in Shiloh, Illinois. Joining them was John Hoffman, who conducts a "first person" living history presentation as Col. William Moultrie and shares the story of the British bombardment of Charleston, South Carolina in June 1776. *(Photo above by Steffany Slininger)*



Memorial Day planning

The Old Glory Camp #6165 Memorial Day Program committee met to finalize any special ceremonies to be performed during the holiday. Left to right; Dave Totsch, Dale Tibbett, Jeff Kaup, Tom Hauff, Lorenzo Florentino, David Marshall, Nick Kaup, Richard Wojewnik. *(Photo submitted by Nick Kaup)*

Honoring the fallen

For Memorial Day weekend, on May 25, Hecker Camp #443 Brothers Russell Schleicher, John Stanton, Greg Zelinske, Richard Piper, Justin Ottolini, Gerald Sonnenberg and Jon Stacy marched in the Belleville, Illinois Memorial Day Parade. Donna Rees graciously volunteered to drive the trailing vehicle behind the formation carrying CC Schleicher.

The same group of brothers, in addition to Brother Eric Rennie and his daughters Bryn and Emilia, came to Walnut Hill Cemetery in Belleville to place and retrieve flags in honor of Memorial Day.





Dedicated cannon by the Benjamin GAR Chicago Post and its interred post members are maintained by Old Glory Camp #6165.

Custer Camp honors the ‘Rock’; local civil war Veterans

Story by Gerald Sonnenberg, Hecker Camp #443

Dept. of Illinois Patriotic Instructor, editor

Photos by Custer Camp #1, submitted by Brother Nick Kaup

The George H. Thomas “Rock of Chickamauga” Memorial in Rosehill Cemetery in Chicago is a massive 12-to-17-ton rough boulder brought directly from the Chickamauga battlefield in Georgia. The monument was erected in 1894 by the George H. Thomas Post No. 5 of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.). The monument was rededicated on Aug. 21, 1994 by the George A. Custer Camp #1. The engraving on the bottom right lists the Civil War Veterans of Post 5.

The monument is roughly 13 feet, 4 inches high and weighs nearly 34,000 pounds. Its inscription says, “The Rock of Chickamauga” to honor Union General George Henry Thomas, who famously held his ground during the second day of the intense 1863 Civil War battle. While General Thomas is actually buried in Troy, New York, this heavy granite monolith stands inside Chicago’s historic Rosehill Cemetery as a tribute to local Civil War Veterans.

The George A. Custer Camp #1 conducts an original GAR ceremony each Memorial Day, and the camp has been active in honoring the memory and sacrifices of those Union soldiers and sailors at Rosehill Cemetery, Chicago for over thirty years.



George A. Custer Camp #1, Department of Illinois prepared for Memorial Day ceremonies with the planting of fresh flowers.



(Above) Members of Battery “L”, 1st Illinois Volunteer Regiment, SVR, pictured at the General George H. Thomas monument in Rosehill Cemetery in Chicago during Memorial Day ceremonies. (Left to right) Past Camp Commander and Department Secretary Don Sherman; William Birzetis, SVR; Barbara Hauff (as our widow); PCC Robert Hauff, SVR Unit Commander; PDC Stuart Stefany, SVR; PCC Mark Braun, Camp Historian.



A photo portraying the widow placing a single rose on the monument to the General George H. Thomas GAR Post of Chicago and its deceased Union Veterans.

Memorial Day ceremony



On May 8, a ceremony to honor Civil War Veterans James Jackson, Isaac Smith and Charles Smith was held in Oak Woods Cemetery in Chicago. In the photo and among those participating were descendants of the Union troops; Illinois Department Commander (DC) Mike Zafran; Sherry Williams, president of the Bronzeville Historical Society; and Camp #39 Tinley Park members, color guard Commander Tim Marcus, Andy Partak and Gerald Nolan. They were honored to have WWII Veteran Willie Melton, who is 99 years old sitting in the front row. (Courtesy photo)



Memorial Day tradition

On May 16, the 19th annual Jewell Grove Cemetery Memorial Day Ceremony in Wheaton, Illinois was held. Illinois DC Mike Zafran organized and hosted the event for the 8th consecutive year.

Attending the ceremony were Drew Ellis, Chairman of Milton Township Wheaton Cemetery Commission; Father Santos Castillo, Pastor St Michael's in Wheaton; Elizabeth "Buffy" Higgins-Beard, Milton Township Supervisor; Brett Nila (top right), past commander of the Illinois VFW, and a Camp #2 member;Carolynn Jacobsen, (pictured right) widow of Camp #2 Brother Bob Jacobsen. Mayor Suess Wheaton; Jennifer Dyer Mickelson portraying Dr. Mary Edwards Walker and sister of Rockford ASUVCW. (Courtesy photos)



An Immigrant in America's Civil War

On July 8, Past Department Commander Nick Kaup and current secretary of Old Glory Camp #6165 (second from left) made a presentation at the Herrin, Illinois city Library on the involvement of the 51st Illinois Volunteer Regiment, Company C, in the battles of Franklin, Spring Hill and Nashville in Tennessee. The event was hosted by the Herrin Woman's Club and was well attended. An authentic Civil War uniform was showcased, along with personal stories from Brother Nick's great grandfather Nicklaus Gerken who fought in these battles. Nick fielded questions on the topic, and used the opportunity to promote the S.U.V.C.W. This event comes in support of the author's new book, *An Immigrant in America's Civil War: 51st Illinois Regiment*. (Courtesy photo)



Fallen brother



Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War Brother William Pool, a proud Veteran of the United States Army, Bronze Star recipient and wounded POW, passed away June 7 at the age of 101. He was also the last known surviving son of an American Civil War Veteran, Charles Parker Pool, who fought for the Union Army in the 6th West Virginia Volunteers.

On Jan. 13, 2025, on his 100th Birthday in Bolivar Missouri, Brother Bob AuBuchon of the Department of Missouri presented Brother Pool with a certificate of membership in the Department of Missouri and an S.U.V.C.W. membership medal. At the time, Mr. Pool's daughter Carolyn George pinned the medal on her father. The full obituary for Brother Pool is [here](#).





Attendees of the 143rd Encampment. (Photo by Owen C. Doak)

143rd Encampment of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW) Department of Illinois takes place

*Abbreviated from the Encampment
Report By Brother Owen C. Doak
U.S. Grant Camp 1863*

On Saturday, May 2, 2026, I had the privilege of representing U.S. Grant Camp 1863 at the 143rd Annual Encampment of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW), Department of Illinois. Eleven months ago, I knew little about the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. I first came across the Sons through a favorable mention by author Clint Smith in his 2021 book, *How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America*.

Since June 2025, I've learned that the Sons are dedicated to honoring and preserving the legacy of Civil War Veterans, promoting patriotism and educating the broader public about the sacrifices made to preserve the Union and end slavery. Over the past year, I've attended several events focused on "keeping green the memory of the boys in blue," guided by principles of fraternity, charity and loyalty (FCL). As a history teacher, I feel right at home as a member of the SUVCW. I love the Sons!

Applicants may join the Sons as an associate member or as a hereditary member. All are welcome. I joined as a hereditary member. I recently learned that I have three Civil War grandfathers who fought for the Union.

Our meeting place for the encampment, the Grand Army of the Republic Hall in Aurora, is a remarkable stone building built in 1877.

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) was a social and political organization of Union Veterans, similar to the American Legion and VFW today. The SUVCW began as a GAR offshoot in



1881. On Aug. 20, 1954, the U.S. Congress officially chartered the SUVCW as the legal successor of the GAR, after the last GAR member died. Local organizations of the SUVCW are called "camps," and I am a member of the U.S. Grant Camp 1863 (Schaumburg/Palatine). The state organization is called the Department of Illinois, under the National SUVCW.

The National Junior Vice Commander in Chief, Robert Payne honored us by joining our Department Encampment. He assisted our meeting by relaying a special message from the National Commander in Chief Kevin Tucker, and with the installation of our Department officers.

After the recognition of guests, a financial audit and the treasurer's report, I was happy to hear the Department of Illinois Commander in Chief Michael Zafran compliment our U.S. Grant Camp 1863 Commander Nick Sauer. "Nick Sauer is doing a great job with his camp, they are very active, he is an excellent brother and an excellent camp Commander."

Each camp then took turns giving updates on their activities, with many simply saying "pass." I thought I would do the same. Then Nick Kaup, a legendary SUVCW leader in Illinois and a member of two camps including U. S. Grant Camp 1863, handed me two flyers and whispered, "Talk about these!" They were concerning the destruction of the steamboat *Sultana* event May 28 and the Palatine Flag Day Celebration on June 13.

See Encampment, next page...

JROTC presentation

Chicago Land Young Marines Sergeant Tobin Munoz (center) was honored on May 10 when he received the the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, Reserve Officer Training Corps award and medal, sanctioned for wear by Sea Cadets and Young Marines, in recognition of his outstanding accomplishments and exceptional service as a Young Marine. This distinguished award comprises a ribbon, medal and commendable certificate. It was presented to Munoz by the President of the Glenview Navy League (far right) and Brother Nick Kaup of Old Glory Camp #6165. (Courtesy photo)



Encampment continued ...

I was a little taken aback, I hadn't prepared anything, but I figured I could handle it. After all, I am a teacher. I talk for a living. This should be no problem. And I did okay describing our May 28 event, a history talk and book signing.

Then I started describing the second event and I lost my train of thought. "Our second event is on Flag Day and it is, uh, . . . a special . . . uh . . . um" I went blank! I couldn't find the words. Seconds went by. A few dozen brothers stared back at me. I remained silent. Was it a dedication? A ceremony? A memorial, no. . . . What the hell? Why can't I think of the word? I recovered when I realized I could just read the flyer: "It is a simple FLAG DAY CELEBRATION. It is on June 13 at 9:30 a.m. at Clayson House Museum in Palatine."

Whew. Just a little embarrassing. In any case, ALL are welcome at this wonderful event, an event largely organized by Senior Vice Commander Michael Gregory of U. S. Grant Camp 1863.

After my awkward little speech about the Flag Day Celebration, Department Signals Officer and past department commander, Bobby Welch, led a discussion on proposed changes to the SUVCW bylaws.

Brother Bobby, a dedicated, devoted, and very active leader in the SUVCW Department of Illinois, is also an expert on the SUVCW bylaws. He led us through several pages of proposed language revisions. After several minutes of reading and explaining the changes, Bobby paused and concluded, "That's all I've got." Someone in the room offered "Thank God!" breaking up the serious discussion with a little humor.

One of the highlights of the afternoon

was when Department of Illinois Commander Michael Zafran gave merit awards to three truly outstanding brothers. He honored Brother Nick Kaup. He encouraged me to join last year and has been a member, leader and organizer for the SUVCW Department of Illinois for over three decades. His sons Jeff Kaup and Dan Kaup are also members of the SUVCW, with Jeff continuing as the Junior Vice Commander for the Department of Illinois 2026-2027. Nick Kaup is another leader whose dedication to the Sons is truly exemplary. He is also a published historian. I look forward to reading his new book, *An Immigrant in America's Civil War: 51st Illinois Regiment* (2026).

Timothy Marcus also received a well-deserved merit award. I met Tim last fall at the mid-year encampment, and I have come to know him as a hardworking business owner and a devoted father and husband. And Tim loves the SUVCW. His dedication to the SUVCW is admirable. He is a Civil War and Union enthusiast to his core.

Brian Conroy won the final merit award for his work in Philip H. Sheridan Camp No. 2. I met Brian last month in a rural cemetery in Cambridge, Illinois. We were dedicating a new gravestone for a Union Veteran, Frank Smith, who died in 1918. We both carried flags in the ceremony.

The 2026 Brother of the Year Award went to Harlan Hawkins of E. F. Dutton Camp 49 of Sycamore, Illinois. I first heard about the great work of Camp 49 last fall at the mid-year encampment in Bloomington. They have connected with local schools and given many educational presentations to dozens of elementary and middle school students on the Civil War and the legacy of the Union soldiers.

Brother Harlan was truly surprised and honored to win the award. I know this because I was sitting right next to him!

A couple of the last items on the agenda were the nomination and installation of the officers. Congratulations to all those elected to Department of Illinois leadership positions. National Junior Vice Commander in Chief Robert Payne once again assisted our meeting by installing our officers.

U.S. Grant Camp 1863 was well represented in the installation ceremony with Nick Kaup, Bob Kurek and Steve Westlake. Bob and Steve have been mentors for me, I consider them both to be good friends and brothers. Bob has assisted and mentored me as the U.S. Grant Camp Secretary for 2026. I thank him for his patience and expertise. Steve stood by my side when I was sworn in last September. And better still, Steve is a White Sox fan! I first met both of them in June of 2025 at the Flag Day Celebration in Palatine.

In his closing remarks, Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Payne once again reminded the Department of Illinois that this summer marks our nation's 250th birthday. He encouraged department and camp commanders to do all they can to reach out to our communities and highlight the sacrifices of those who fought for freedom. He also urged us to make clear--in our events, communications and on social media--the patriotic connections between the Revolutionary War soldiers and Union soldiers. He concluded, "We must never forget the price paid to preserve our Union and end slavery."





Photos by Jon Stacy and Gerald Sonnenberg

Koerner House helps celebrate 250

The historic Koerner House (above) is located at the corner of 200 Abend in Belleville, Illinois, and was the home to former Illinois Lt. Governor Gustave Koerner. The group managing this historic site joined with other Belleville museums June 20, to celebrate the country's 250th birthday. The Col. Friedrich K. Hecker Camp was invited to participate.

While Koerner House staff and volunteers provided several group tours and presentations, Hecker Camp members Jon Stacy, Richard Piper, Greg Zelinske, John Stanton and Gerald Sonnenberg, (pictured top right, left to right, in the living room in front of portraits of Gustave and Sophie Koerner) displayed a tent, antiques, memorabilia, equipment and photographs to the dozens in attendance. Brothers Sonnenberg and Piper also had the chance to perform the manual of arms with "private" Charlotte (bottom photo).

Gustav Philipp Koerner, also spelled Gustave or Gustavus Koerner, was born Nov. 20, 1809 in Frankfurt, Germany and died April 9, 1896 in Belleville. He was a German-American revolutionary, journalist, lawyer, politician, judge and statesman in Illinois and Germany, and a colonel of the U.S. Army who was a confessed enemy of slavery.

In Germany, he was a revolutionary trying to help Germany become a free and democratic country. Essentially blacklisted for his efforts, Koerner boarded a ship in Le Havre sailing to North America on May 1, 1833 with a group of emigrants headed by the patriarch of the Engelmann family, whose son Theodor was an old friend of his from college. On the passage he became engaged to his future wife Sophie, a daughter of Engelmann's who was born in Imsbach in the Palatinate (Pfalz), a historic region of Germany. He married Sophie Dorothea Engelmann on June 17, 1836 in Belleville, where they had nine children.

Koerner was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives in 1842, served on the Illinois Supreme Court from 1845 to 1848, and as the 12th Lieutenant Governor of Illinois from 1853 to 1857.

He belonged to the co-founders and was one of the first members of the Grand Old Party, and was a close confidant of Abraham Lincoln and his wife Mary Todd. He had an essential role in his nomination and election for president in 1860.

In 1861, Koerner was instrumental in raising the 43rd Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment, but before its organization had been completed, he was appointed Colonel of Volunteers and assigned as aide to Gen. John C. Frémont, upon whose removal he was assigned to Gen. Henry W. Halleck's staff as Brigadier General. He resigned in April 1862 due to impaired health. Shortly thereafter, he succeeded Carl Schurz as United States Ambassador to Spain.



THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

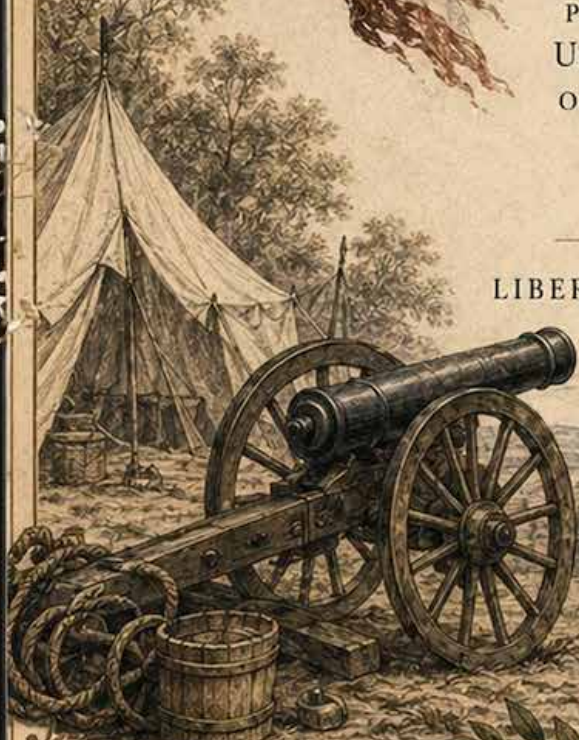
FOR LIBERTY AND INDEPENDENCE

1775 - 1783

WE, THEREFORE, THE REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
IN GENERAL CONGRESS, ASSEMBLED,
APPEALING TO THE SUPREME JUDGE
OF THE WORLD FOR THE RECTITUDE
OF OUR INTENTIONS, DO, IN THE NAME,
AND BY AUTHORITY OF THE GOOD
PEOPLE OF THESE COLONIES, SOLEMNLY
PUBLISH AND DECLARE, THAT THESE
UNITED COLONIES ARE, AND OF RIGHT
OUGHT TO BE FREE AND INDEPENDENT
STATES.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

LIBERTY ★ COURAGE ★ SACRIFICE



UNITED WE STAND

DIVIDED WE FALL