

AMERICAN CIVIL WAR: SPRING 1862

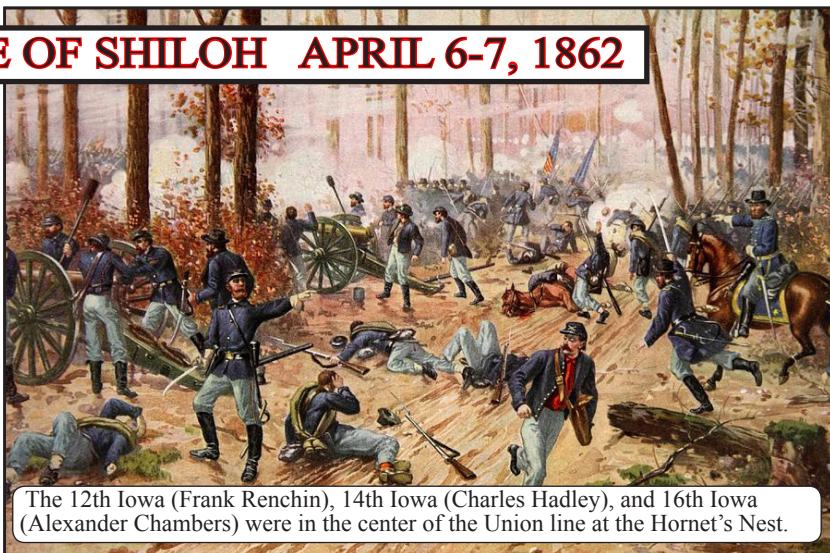
1861
1865

THE BATTLE OF SHILOH AND AFTERMATH SESQUICENTENNIAL: STEELE COUNTY IN THE CIVIL WAR

2011
2015

AT THE BATTLE OF SHILOH APRIL 6-7, 1862

Alexander Chambers
(buried in Forest Hill Cemetery)
Charles Hadley
(an Owatonna real estate agent)
Frank Renchin
(Czech pioneer of Steele County)



The 12th Iowa (Frank Renchin), 14th Iowa (Charles Hadley), and 16th Iowa (Alexander Chambers) were in the center of the Union line at the Hornet's Nest.

There is perhaps no more famous Civil War icon than the Hornet's Nest at Shiloh. Ranking with Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg, Bloody Lane at Antietam, and the Stone Wall at Fredericksburg, Shiloh's Hornet's Nest is well known to even the most amateur of Civil War buffs. Shiloh's Hornet's Nest lies in the center of the battlefield and was the scene of heavy combat on both days of the battle. On the first day, elements of three Union divisions manned the line along a little-used farm road that ran through the J.R. Duncan land. Duncan and his family worked a small cotton field that bordered the road to the south. With its open fields of fire and road cover, there is little wonder that the Duncan plot became one of the most important localities on the battlefield. Heavy fighting raged in the area of the Hornet's Nest on the first day, with no less than eight distinct Confederate attacks turned back by the determined defenders of the Sunken Road. Attesting to the fury in the area, Confederates so named the location because, they said, the enemy's bullets sounded like swarms of angry hornets.

The Battle of Shiloh

By mid-February 1862, United States forces had won decisive victories at Mill Springs, Ky. (recall: this was the first battle for the 2nd MN Regiment), and Forts Henry and Donelson in Tenn. These successes opened the way for invasion up the Tennessee River to sever Confederate rail communications along the important Memphis & Charleston and Mobile & Ohio railroads.

Forced to abandon Kentucky and Middle Tennessee, Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston, supreme Confederate commander in the West, moved to protect his rail communications by concentrating his scattered forces around the small town of Corinth in northeast Mississippi—strategic crossroads of the Memphis & Charleston and the Mobile & Ohio.

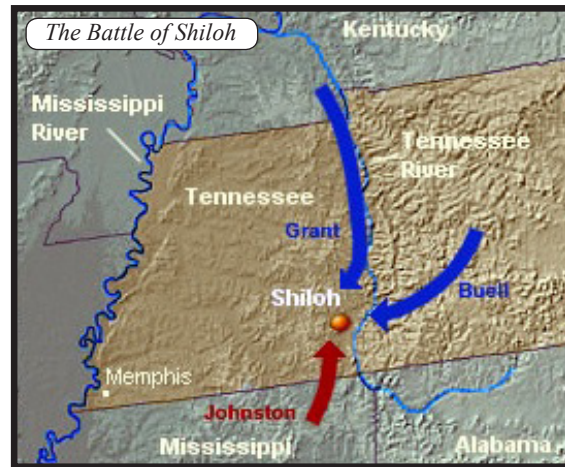
In March the Union army advanced under Maj. Gens. Ulysses S. Grant and Don Carlos Buell southward to sever the Southern railroads. Grant ascended the Tennessee River by steamboat, disembarking his Army of the Tennessee at Pittsburg Landing, 22 miles northeast of Corinth. There he established a base of operations on a plateau west of the river, with his forward camps posted two miles inland around a log church called Shiloh Meeting House.

General Johnston, aware of Federal designs on Corinth, planned to smash Grant's army at Pittsburg Landing before Buell would be able to join Grant. He placed his troops in motion and by nightfall, April 5, his Army of the Mississippi, nearly 44,000 men present for duty, was finally deployed for battle four miles southwest of Pittsburg Landing.

At daybreak, Sunday, April 6, the Confederates stormed out of the woods and assailed the forward Federal camps around Shiloh Church. Grant and his nearly 40,000 men present for duty were

equally surprised by the onslaught. The Federals soon rallied, however, and bitter fighting consumed "Shiloh Hill."

Throughout the morning, Confederate brigades slowly gained ground, forcing Grant's troops to give way, grudgingly, to fight a succession of defensive stands at Shiloh Church, the Peach Orchard, Water Oaks Pond, and within an impenetrable oak thicket



battle survivors named the Hornet's Nest.

Despite having achieved surprise, Johnston's troops soon became as disorganized as the Federals. The Southern attack lost coordination as corps, divisions, and brigades became entangled. Then, at mid-afternoon, as he supervised an assault on the Union left, Johnston was struck in the right leg by a stray bullet and bled to death, leaving Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard in command of the Confederate army. Grant's battered divisions retired to a strong position extending west from Pittsburg Landing where massed artillery and rugged ravines protected their front and flanks. Fighting ended at nightfall.

Overnight, reinforcements from Buell's army reached Pittsburg Landing. Beauregard, unaware Buell had arrived, planned to finish the destruction of Grant the next day. At dawn, April 7, however, it was Grant who attacked. Throughout the day, the combined Union armies, numbering over 54,500 men, hammered Beauregard's

Continued on page

ating from West Point Chambers served in various garrison posts from New York to New Mexico and Texas.

When the Civil War broke out Chambers was a captain in the 18th U. S. Infantry and was assigned to mustering duty in Iowa. In that capacity, it was his responsibility to oversee the induction of Iowa volunteers into President Lincoln's army. Every Iowa regiment from the 1st through the 16th was, company by company, sworn in by Captain Chambers.

In March 1862, when Iowa Gov. Kirkwood needed a Colonel for his newest regiment, the 16th Iowa, it was obvious to all that the right man was immediately available. Alexander Chambers was appointed Colonel on March 24, 1862 and two weeks later found himself in the center of the worst battle Americans had fought in since the birth of the nation.

Frank Renchin was shot in the right thigh during the battle, was left on the field, and captured at the Hornet's Nest. He was then sent to a Confederate prison.

After eight months of confinement at Camp Oglethorpe, near Macon, Ga., the 12th Iowa regiment was paroled in exchange for Confederate prisoners. Renchin was discharged from the army in January 1863 due to his injuries.

Frank Renchin's parents and siblings had moved to Steele County during or shortly after the Civil War. After his discharge, Renchin clerked at a store in Cedar Rapids and helped found a Czech reading society. He moved to Steele County between 1870 and 1875 to join his family. He remained in Steele County for 25

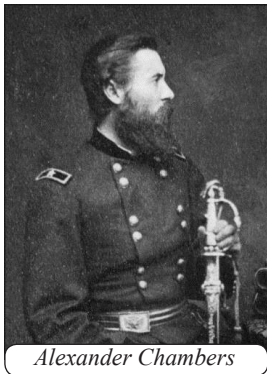
years before moving to Stevens County, then Dodge County, and finally Hennepin County where he died in 1913.

While the first "after-action reports" listed Charles Hadley as missing-in-action, later records show that he too was captured and imprisoned by the confederates. By September 1862 Charles was paroled and by the following June he was discharged from the army.

After the war he read law in the office of his father, R. S. Hadley. He relocated to Owatonna in 1866, resumed the study of law, and was admitted to the bar at Waseca, October 18, 1866. He never became an active practitioner here, but used his legal skills to aid him in his business life. He was for a number of years engaged in the real estate business in Owatonna.

Alexander Chambers was twice wounded on April 6th at Shiloh. He recovered sufficiently to again lead his regiment at the Battle of Iuka, Miss. on Sept. 19, 1862 where he was severely wounded. For much of 1863 and 1864 Chambers was assigned to less arduous duty around Vicksburg, MS and Chattanooga, Tenn. After the war Chambers served as a Judge Advocate for the Army, as a military attaché for the US in Turkey, and in command of the 4th and 9th U. S. mounted infantry troops in the Battle of the Rosebud (1876 near Little Big Horn and a week before George Custer's last chapter).

As a career soldier Alexander Chambers did not maintain an ongoing permanent residence in Owatonna. His parents and family did live in Owatonna and contributed significantly to its history. Alexander listed his parent's address in Owatonna as his residence when he joined the 16th Iowa. He also stayed with his family during most of his lengthy disability leaves. On Jan. 2, 1888 Alexander Chambers died and he is buried in Forest Hill Cemetery next to his brother, Clarke. The inscriptions on his tombstone tell more Civil War history than does any other in southern Minnesota.

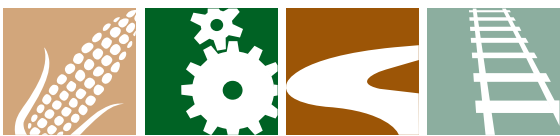


Alexander Chambers



Charles Hadley

STEELE COUNTY



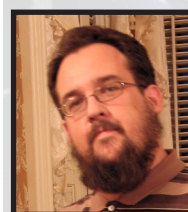
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

It's About Time...



Brig. Gen. Alexander Chambers is buried in Forest Hill Cemetery, next to his brother Clarke Chambers and near the rest of his family that resided in Owatonna during the Civil War.

Chambers spent time during his convalescent leaves with his parents and family in Owatonna.



Daniel Moeckly Series Editor

University in 2005, his local work began at the Owatonna Arts Center, documenting the OAC permanent collection.

Daniel Moeckly first felt the pull to history as a profession in 2004 when he worked as an archaeologist in Greece. After earning a double degree in History and Philosophy from Iowa State

Two years later Dan started his own business featuring archive and digital file management. He was soon contracted by both the Steele County Historical Society and the Orphanage Museum.

Today Daniel enjoys employment as Archive and Program Manager with the Historical Society and as a Project Coordinator with the Orphanage Museum.

"Volunteers are the backbone of these organizations. It is very rewarding to preserve our community's history, come in and volunteer!"