

# OUR CAMP JOURNAL

Volume 28, Issue 3

"We are but few in number but formidable." -Pvt. James Shelton, 7th Md. Co. B

October 2024



## OTHELLO REGIONAL PARK



I saw't not, thought it not, it harmed not me....

By Bill Hart

**Editor's note:** *The event was held at Othello Regional Park near Frederick, Md., and is NOT a play by Shakespeare.*

The afternoon of Friday, September 6<sup>th</sup> found several members of the 7<sup>th</sup> setting up canvas at Frederick County's Othello Regional Park near Knoxville, Maryland to prepare for the park's first Civil War Day in the Park. By evening a camp had been established with a roaring fire, a meal had been foraged and all was made ready

for the few soldiers who were staying the night. We were alerted to a pack of coyotes that inhabited the park, but they disappointed. Some howls and yipping were heard early in the evening but that was the extent of their presence for the weekend. The night turned out to be pleasantly mild and sleep was good.

No reveille was held but the troops rose early and prepared breakfast for themselves before more men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Maryland, the 7<sup>th</sup> Maryland and the Maryland independent artillery section began

arriving and settling in. Their ease was short-lived with the appearance of Sergeant Bittermann. As is his custom, he immediately began making noise about drill. After a flurry of menacing threats, the sergeant had a private laugh and ordered breakfast for the troops. He gave the men the opportunity for a leisurely meal before assembling them to commence drill. He ran his small squad through a variety of evolutions to sharpen them up for the afternoon demonstrations.

The sky was threatening

through most of the morning, but the park ranger assured us that any rain that occurred would pass us by to the west and north. He was a better ranger than a meteorologist. At about 11:30, the skies burst, and a driving rain commenced. It lasted until 1:00 when it suddenly stopped. One o'clock was the time set for Saturday's first firing demonstration, so the sergeant formed up his squad and marched them to the demonstration field while a small crowd assembled to observe.

Sergeant Bitterman arranged not only a firing demo, but also a bit of drill and a run through of the manual of arms. Private Lafferty did an outstanding job of not only narrating what the troops were doing but also the

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Participants gather in the shade of a tree at the Othello Regional Park event. Soldiers and civilians from the 7th Maryland and 3rd Maryland took part in the demonstrations.





# Upcoming Campaigns

## OCTOBER

October 18-20: 160<sup>th</sup> Battle of Cedar Creek, Middletown, VA - Register at: [www.ccbf.us](http://www.ccbf.us)

(Company event) \*(FVB Event)

## NOVEMBER

November 16-17: FVB Annual Meeting & Remembrance Day Parade (Company event)  
\*(FVB Event)

## DECEMBER

Events To Be Announced



## OTHELLO REGIONAL PARK

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why and purpose of what they were doing as well as addressing all the questions of the spectators. The men looked sharp and did the company proud. Sergeant Bitterman had drilled them well although it must be acknowledged that he had good material to work with even if they were a bit rusty. The squad performed with distinction, modestly accepted the spectators' applause and marched off singing in the manner that becomes the men of Maryland.

The afternoon was spent around the campfire watching the roast of beef that Major Kevin Harris had put

on in the morning, swapping tales, and talking with visitors who came by to view our camp and observe camp life. The skies turned clear and blue after the morning's down-pour and a second demo came off at 3:00 that was as impressive as the first.

Besides the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup>, there were several other participants in the event; Civil War Medicine, Women in the Civil War, and Sons of Union Veterans among them but the Marylanders were as always, the star performers and center of attention. The threat of rain and the rain itself worked to limit the number of visitors as did several compet-

ing events going on the same day in the county. Nonetheless the park rangers considered the occasion a success and hope to repeat the event.

Supper was delicious thanks to Miss Sarah and to "roast-master" Harris. Most of the troops left after the meal and a bit of socializing while the few who remained made themselves comfortable around the fire as the wind picked up making it seem cooler than the temperature indicated. Into the night, the wind blew like what seemed like a hurricane turning the campfire into a blowtorch with flames blowing sideways. All survived the night despite the weather. Sunday morn-

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At right, partially obscured Sgt. Bitterman (AKA Steve Giovannini) puts the combined company through s firing demonstration for the gathered spectators.



## OTHELLO REGIONAL PARK

ing dawned calm, and we had a good breakfast before breaking down the camp, exchanging farewells and returning to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Sarah was approached with this opportunity back toward the end of June. She picked up the ball and ran with it and we were able to participate and have a good time with this event as well as help the Frederick County Park Service. The 7<sup>th</sup> excelled as usual but in truth, it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Maryland's turnout that really made the show. Without their participation, the demonstrations

would have come off as a bit underwhelming.

I can't say enough about the support the Frederick County Park Service gave us. They provided an excellent facility for our comfort. Water, ice, firewood – good 1<sup>st</sup> quality firewood at that – 21<sup>st</sup> century indoor sinks as well as port-a-jons, 24-hour on-call support if required. The county put on a first-class event, and we were treated like celebrities.

I've already cited Sarah for organizing us for this event, but she also did her customary job of ensuring

we were well and deliciously fed and demonstrating civilian activities to visitors. I've already mentioned Sergeant Bittermann (that's of course Steve Giovannini in his on-stage persona) and Mike Lafferty for their excellence in presenting a super demonstration for the spectators but their contributions merit repeating. Major Harris hauled all the camp gear and canvas as well as being the primary in setting it all up, procured the beef and cooked it and as always bought extra firewood in addition to what the county gave us. Thanks to everyone who came and made this a memorable event.



From top left, Bill Hart, Josh Harris and Kevin Harris hold down the camp. Bill Hart catches a quick nap before the roast is ready for dinner.





Good times in and around the camp for civilians and soldiers alike.

The rain abated and the day quickly cleared, though becoming windy and chilly.

# BEHOLD!, OTHELLO!



For more pictures visit the 7th MD website at <https://7thmaryland.com/>



# DRILL AT OTHELLO REGIONAL PARK



Sgt. Bitterman (AKA Steve Giovannini) puts the troops through loading and firing drills before the gathered spectators at the Othello Regional Park event.

Troops demonstrated the Manual of Arms, a variety of carries and loading and firing in nine times.

For more pictures visit the 7th MD website at <https://7thmaryland.com/>





*National Cemeteries Series*

# Poplar Grove National Cemetery

By Pvt. Jeff Joyce

Poplar Grove National Cemetery, part of Petersburg National Battlefield, was created after the end of the Civil War. During the siege of Petersburg from June 1864 to April 1865 Union soldiers who died in battle or from disease were buried in graves throughout the area. In 1866 a survey was conducted to lo-

cate land for a new National Cemetery outside Petersburg and an eight-acre farm just south of the city was selected. During the siege the tract of land had been the campground for the 50th New York Volunteer Engineers. While there the engineers had constructed a gothic-style, pine log church called Poplar Grove.

Union soldiers from nearly 100 separate burial sites around Petersburg were buried at Poplar Grove. Re-

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Below, Pine Grove National Cemetery in Petersburg, Va. Below left is the gothic-style church constructed by the 50th NYV Engineers. Below right, Confederate works at Petersburg.



Above, Poplar Grove National Cemetery. Left, Gothic-style church built by the 50th NYV. Right, Confederate works at Petersburg.

# Centre-Table Gossip.

## ORNAMENTS.

AS many of our lady readers know, there is generally a rage for some one stone, or style of setting, in jewelry. We do not speak of costly sets, as pearl or diamonds, but of those accessible to ordinary purchasers.

The topaz had its day, and was succeeded by turquoise; for a time every one, without regard to complexion, wore brooch and ear-rings of cerulean blue. Then garnets; then enamel of blue or green; and now, with a proper mixture of pearl, garnet and enamel, turquoise being entirely out of date, coral ornaments seem to be the favorites.

We mentioned, in a late number, the costly sets found at Ball & Black's, imitating flowers and fruit. When last coral was in vogue, the carvings were more in the style of cameo cuttings, as figures, heads, etc., in medallion, and of the dark red hue generally seen in the necklaces of infants. White and rose color are now the favorite shades. There are many new designs in setting; a branch highly polished, for instance, encircled in coils of gold; a single blossom or fruit, as a pear or a fuchsia, set in the same way, and forming the centre of the pin, or the drop of the ear-ring. A very pretty brooch—we speak now of simple ornaments—in this style costs from seven to twelve dollars.

Garnets are sometimes set on a glowing red or crimson ground, which gives them a singular flashing, vivid color. One of the favorite designs is in imitation of the section of a branch or stem of a tree, encrusted with gold and garnets. These are, of course, large and showy brooches. We have seen a few encrusted with turquoise in the same style. Enamelled ornaments are still worn, but are not so much the rage as for a few years past. For mourning brooches, see the fashion article of the present month.

Pearls are still in high favor with those whose purses and whose complexions can afford them.

*From Godey's Ladies Book, Volume 48, June 1854*

## Familiar Hints for Indiana Soldiers Taking the Field

### V. TRANSPORTATION AND RAILROAD CAR DEFENSE.

*This is the fifth of the Familiar Hints to Indiana Soldiers taking the Field prepared for Indiana Volunteers in 1862 that has been printed in the pages of Our Camp Journal. These are not evolutions that were likely drilled very often if at all. Most probably only read out to the troops by their NCO's if they were being transported by rail or steamboat.*

**By Cars.**—Load and unload by platoons, one to the car. A train can load in ten minutes. If in a hostile country, unite the knapsacks of comrades on a seat, hang them between the windows, covering the vital parts. The man by the window can have a ready fire, having the butt of musket against interior leg of seat, leaning to window. Comrade carries his piece erect, between his feet. He can load while other fires. Exchanging pieces. The men by the windows are number one—their comrades in the seat are number

two. If trains stops number twos pass out opposite side from attack—falling upon the ground, firing beneath the car, until the whole command can form. If attack be upon both sides, the men should remain firm until the commanding officer selects his place of formation, and then, steadily, by files, march to their position. Haste will only disorganize. Meanwhile a fire may be maintained by a squad from each car to divert attack from the forming parties. Coolness in such circumstances is indispensable to safety; and a prompt formation will defeat the enemy.

**Remember,** that no train will be urged into the face of a large force. Such attacks are by guerrillas, or small detachments. Your self-possession will save you, and a brisk attack will ruin the assailants.

**On Steamboats.**—Don't spread over the boat at first. Twice as many men as you suppose may be quartered on a steamer. If formed in single rank, in any space, seven feet deep—face to the partition—unsling knapsacks—deposit them six inches apart—number your men by companies in whole numbers—unsling and spread blankets—four double—and you have room and every man has his place.

**Remember,** that loud talking is unbecoming a soldier. Never be so situated that the call of your officer cannot be at once heard and responded to. You are minute men in this war. A minute lost is lost forever. Save the minutes, and your toils and labors will soon be at an end.

*Contributed by Bill Hart*



# OUR CAMP JOURNAL



*Civil War Re-enactors;  
America's Living Historians.*

## Poplar Grove

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maines were moved from nine Virginia counties, reaching as far west as Lynchburg, Virginia. By 1869 6,718 remains had been reinterred at Poplar Grove, including 2,138 unknowns.

Nearly 30,000 Confederate dead from the Petersburg area were buried at Blandford Church Cemetery in Petersburg, with all by 2,000 unidentified.

In 1933, the War Department transferred responsibility for the cemetery to the National Park Service (NPS), which administers fourteen National Cemeteries. Poplar Grove is also the final resting place of soldiers who served in the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II and the Korean War. One British soldier, Sergeant Major George Symons, is buried at Poplar Grove. He was

a member of the Royal Fusiliers and died from influenza in 1918 while training American soldiers at Camp Lee (now Fort Gregg-Adams) during World War I. The cemetery was closed to new interments in 1957. However, on Memorial Day 2003 three unknown Union soldiers discovered near Petersburg were reinterred at Poplar Grove.

Several members of the 7<sup>th</sup> Maryland rest at Poplar Grove. Private David Stepney of Company A was killed on June 18, 1864, during an unsuccessful assault on Confederate works at Petersburg (the Dimmock Line). David had enlisted at the age of 16 in August 1862. Private Peter Biser of Company G was killed during the Battle of Five Forks on April 1, 1865. Peter and his brother John William both enlisted in August 1862. Due to poor record keeping Peter's name was recorded as "C.B. Biser" as reflected on his headstone.



The headstones of Pvt. David Stepney (misspelled as "Stepherg"), 7th Maryland, Co. A, Royal Fuisillers SGT M George M. Symonds who succumbed to influenza in 1917 and Pvt. Peter Biser, Co. G in the Poplar Grove National Cemetery. Due to poor record keeping Peter Biser's name was recorded as "C.B. Biser" as reflected on his headstone.