



2nd MINNESOTA BATTERY

“ACTION FRONT”

Circular No. 293

November 2021

On This Date-160 Years Ago

The Trent Affair

(Compiled from several Civil War web resources)

The Trent Affair, also known as the Mason and Slidell Affair, was an international diplomatic incident that occurred during the American Civil War. On November 8, 1861, the *USS San Jacinto*, commanded by Union Captain Charles Wilkes, intercepted the British mail packet *RMS Trent* and removed, as contraband of war, two Confederate diplomats, James Mason and John Slidell. The envoys were bound for Great Britain and France to press the Confederacy's case for diplomatic recognition by Europe.

The initial reaction in the United States was to rally against Britain, threatening war; but President Abraham Lincoln and his top advisors did not want to risk war. In the Confederate States, the hope was that the incident would lead to a permanent rupture in Anglo-American relations and even diplomatic recognition by Britain of the Confederacy. Confederates realized their independence potentially depended on a war between Britain and the U.S. In Britain, the public expressed outrage at this violation of neutral rights and insult to their national honor. The British government demanded an apology and the release of the prisoners while it took steps to strengthen its military forces in Canada and the Atlantic.

After several weeks of tension and loose talk of war, the crisis was resolved when the Lincoln administration released the envoys and disavowed Captain Wilkes's actions. No formal apology was issued. Mason and Slidell resumed their voyage to Britain, but failed in their goal of achieving diplomatic recognition.

Upcoming Events

November 5-7, Pier 55, Red Wing., MN

We will provide a Civil War Learning Experience for the Pier 55 Red Wing Area Seniors. The address is 240 Harrison Street. The intent is to display the 12 Pdr Mountain Howitzer, dioramas, firearms, uniforms & equipment, quilts, SAS and any other Civil War items. Setup will be in their large exercise room and will take place after 10:00am on Thursday, November 4. There will be no scheduled presentations of information. Our members are asked to volunteer in their period clothing and be available to answer any visitor's questions. The event timing is Friday & Saturday 10:00am – 4:00pm and Sunday 10:00am – 2:00pm. We will solicit volunteers during our October meeting.

November 11, Winona, MN Veterans Day

This annual recognition in a beautiful park on the lake shore has includes a salute from our gun at the conclusion of the ceremonies. We will once again provide a gun crew for the day. Those attending should arrive at the park by 10:00 to unload the gun and be ready for the program that starts at 11:11 am.

This event goes on rain or shine and is a honor to participate in. If you have not attended this event before, it is both an honor and an incredible experience to hear the gun volleys echo off the river valley's bluffs.

Next Meeting

January ?? Date TBA, 2022 11:00am

The meeting will be held at Marie's Underground Grill in Red Wing.

Contact Ken Cunningham with questions or agenda items. 651-388-2945.



Battery Profile

William Russell

William provided his life history to the Pension Department, starting with his birth on May 1, 1836, in Pope's Mill, New York. He was the oldest of 12 children and admitted that he could not remember all their names anymore. When William was 10 or 12 years old, his father went west seeking new opportunities and soon sent for the family. They went by boat from New York to Green Bay, Wisconsin, and they began farming not far from Green Bay. When William grew up, he began working in the saw mills, though he said he had worked in the mills before the family moved from New York as well.

When the Civil War broke out, William enlisted in Company A of the 8th Wisconsin Volunteers. William was quick to point out that the 8th was the "Eagle Regiment", the regiment known for carrying a live bald eagle throughout the war as their mascot. He also claimed the bird had been captured wild on his father's farm and that "it got tame. We used to throw it up and it would come right back to us. We carried it all through the war with us, and it died after the war, it is stuffed and now in the State Capitol at Madison."

William was right, the 8th Wisconsin did carry an eagle with them as their mascot and it was stuffed and kept in the capitol after the war, but it was not caught on the Russell farm. It taken from the nest as a baby and hand raised by a family named McCann until it became too big and "sassy" according to reports. Dan McCann sold the bird as a mascot to the officers of Company B for \$2.50. When the regiment was fully organized, Old Abe, as the eagle became known, was adopted by the entire regiment.

The official date of William's enlistment was September 14, 1861. He went with the regiment through training at Camp Randall and then on to Missouri. On October 15, the regiment began their southern campaign in earnest. They marched to the Big River where they had to wade across waist deep water carrying all their regimental baggage. Once across, they marched to Pilot Knob to join in the attempt to capture Confederate Jeff Thompson's troops. When they approached Greenville, they found the enemy in line of battle in the woods and it was their first real fight. The enemy was driven off and the Union troops camped there until November 25 when they moved to Sulphur Springs, Missouri. In January, the regiment moved to Cairo, Illinois, and settled into barracks at Fort Defiance where they did guard duty.

When the 8th left Cairo, William was not with them, he being noted as absent on the March/April muster roll. He was left sick at the Mound City Hospital in Illinois. The July/August muster roll said William was "absent sick on certificate of disability" and the September/August roll said he was absent without leave. The next official notation was to label William a deserter.



In William's mind, however, he had done nothing wrong. When he had recovered from his illness in the hospital at Mound City, he was discharged. William took the discharge to mean he was discharged from the army, not just the hospital, so he went home to Northport, Wisconsin, where his wife and children waited.

The health troubles William had kept him struggling for almost a year according to his memory and when he was strong again, he decided to go south to find his regiment and rejoin them. He said he had a pass and uniform, so he was admitted into the lines with ease, but he could not find the 8th Wisconsin. He said no one could tell him where the regiment was then stationed, so he gave up and went back to LaCrosse, Wisconsin. There, he caught a boat going up river to Fort Snelling in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he again enlisted on the 18th of August, 1864. He was assigned to the Second Minnesota Light Artillery. Their descriptive roll showed William as 26 years old, 5' 7-1/4" tall, with hazel eyes, black hair and a dark complexion. His occupation was that of a lumber man. William received a bounty of \$33.33 and was promised another \$66.67 at the end of his one year obligation.

William went south to join the Battery in garrison duty and scouting near Chattanooga, Tennessee, for the last year of the war and returned with them to Fort Snelling to be mustered out. Here again, a somewhat different understanding on William's part created some problems. Because of the bounties and back pay due the men of the Battery, a large amount of cash was needed to pay them off, more than the Fort had on hand. Captain Hotchkiss gave his men two weeks in which they could go home if they chose, just as long as they returned to be paid off and discharged. William decided to go home, but while there, he became sick again. He was too ill to travel for five or six weeks and by that time, it was so late, he decided not to bother with going back at all. Thus, William had served honorably in two units during the Civil War and received a discharge from neither.

The Deadly History of the Victorian Green Dye

The Scheele Green Dye used in wallpapers, clothing, and ornaments was a beautiful, silent, and deadly killer for many.

1 9th century Britain had its fair share of mysteries, but none as deathly and conspicuous as the one behind the arsenic-laden green dye. Many families grieved the untimely loss of their children, but little did they know that the one responsible for that death is that emerald green wallpaper in their house. What follows below is the story of how everyone learned, the hard way around, to avoid the in-vogue green dye.



The Discovery of Scheele Green

Are you still wrapping your head around how a color laced with arsenic poison became so popular and why customers continued to use it despite its side effects? For that, we will have to dig a little into Victorian history.

Even though every imaginable dye is readily available nowadays, that wasn't true for the Victorian era. Many complained about the shades washing out and of the pigments' poor mimicry of the real-life colors. Being unable to replicate the fresh, bright green of plants was a sore spot.

However, Carl Wilhelm Scheele, a Swedish pharmaceutical chemist, discovered a fix to this problem. He created a dye in 1775, a fully saturated bright hue of green out of copper arsenic. This color became a favorite and soon could be seen in about every household. Little did everyone know the cost of this color. Alison Matthews David, in her book *Fashion Victims*, writes: "This chemical green's brilliance, cheapness, and relative ease of use made it an ideal, reliable fashion color until the public rejected it as poisonous more than eighty years after its invention."

Most people would develop a rash after wearing what commonly came to be known as Scheele's Green. It was readily used for wallpapers, hair ornaments, the green ink on stickable stamps, and clothing.

Arsenic was generally also used in beauty products, for candy coating and food coloring. Being around or consuming small amounts of arsenic poison every day set the gullible consumers down a dark and sick fate, one that ended in death a bit too often.

It's Bad, but How Bad is it?

The truth eventually comes up, and that was the case with Scheele's Green too. It started surfacing in closed medical quarters. Arsenic wasn't legally declared a poison, but it dates back to the 1851 motion in the House of Lords in the United Kingdom. There had been a spike in crimes. Unbeknownst to many, an alarming number of wives had started using this sluggish poison on their husbands.

Even though doctors had also started hypothesizing its poisonous nature, they were unclear about its intensity. The truth was that being around arsenic-coated products wasn't affecting everyone the same way. Its symptoms also mimicked other illnesses and so was regularly misdiagnosed. However, some cases made it impossible to deny that arsenic was poison after all.

Green Vomit

In 1861, the 19-year-old Matilda Scheuer fell victim to Scheele's green. Her gory and horrifying case caught the attention of the print media. A young artificial flower maker, her job was to dust hair ornaments with a green powder. She soon grew sick, and devastatingly so. In her last days, she had started throwing up green vomit, and the whites of her eye had also started turning green. She famously, and insidiously, is known to desperately remark that "everything she looked at was green." The autopsy revealed the obvious: most of her organs had traces of arson. This incident was a decided push towards increasing public alarm at the side effects of Scheele's green dye.

The Case of Amelia Turner

It dates back to 3rd April 1862, London, a year after the Matilda Scheuer case. On that ill-fated day, Dr. Orton was summoned to the Turner household. Their fourth child, Ann Amelia, was sick. Their other three children had shown the same symptoms, and none of them survived. Dr. Orton, one of the top medical professionals of his time, was at his wit's end. His initial diagnosis was similar to that of the local surgeon: diphtheria. Diphtheria, a household name at that time, included symptoms like rashes, sore throat, muscle weakness, and coughing.

However, much to his and the family's dismay, the prescribed treatment wasn't working. The symptoms were similar, but the treatment wasn't. Feeling the conscientious burden of a fourth child's potential death, Dr. Orton set out on a mission to investigate the cause. He carefully studied the Turner family's living conditions, combing through their water supply and neighborhood. Finding those in "capital condition, well-drained and ventilated," he was at a loss until he stepped into the Turner bedroom.

The Turner bedroom had that infamous bright green wallpaper. He recalled the theory circulating in closed medical circles of Scheele's green toxic components. Eager to hold onto this lead, he decided to consult a chemist. During this entire process, Amelia Turner died a tragic early death. She died within a month of Dr. Orton's care.

Dr. Orton called on the chemist Dr. Letheby to do Amelia's autopsy. Testing her tissue sample confirmed what they both had feared. She had fallen victim to arsenic poisoning. It caused an uproar in the press, and Dr. Orton decided to call for an inquest into the dye. Despite the evidence, the jury and judge erred on the side of caution. They couldn't wrap their heads around its disproportionate effect on others; why didn't everyone get affected by their proximity to the green dye? This death was ruled to be from natural causes.

William Russell

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Of his family life, William was less certain of the facts. He was married the first time before the war and he remembered at least one child, perhaps two, that they had while living in Northport, Wisconsin. His first wife died, and after the war, he remarried again. He didn't remember any children with her, but thinks there might have been as he knew he had three children that were still living in 1920. When his second wife died, William married once more, but he was sure there were not children by that marriage.

William's brother, John, had a little better memory than William. He said William was first married to Lavina St. Clair and they had two girls. She died after William came home from the war. William's second wife was Almira Carroll and they had two sons. John said he never knew of another marriage.

The irregularities of William's service record and his shaky memory brought some hard looks from the Pension Department and a close examination to be certain that he did indeed merit the pension. One question asked him was why he waited so long to apply as he would have been eligible many years earlier. William did not apply until 1920. William said he was a carpenter and a joiner and he could get all the work he wanted, so he just didn't want to be bothered with all the trouble of filing out a pension application. When he did apply, it was because he was living at the "Poor House" near Rhinelander, Wisconsin, on the Oneida County Poor Farm. A social worker with the Red Cross was helping William apply. She was later appointed his guardian as he had been judged a "spendthrift" and needed someone to care for him and his affairs.

A deposition from one of the men in Company A of the 8th Wisconsin described William as a "jovial sort of fellow, singing a good deal."

Two years after receiving his pension, William died at St. Mary's Hospital in Rhinelander. It was March 23, 1922, and he was 85 years old. The death was ruled as being due to old age. He was laid to rest in the Rhinelander Cemetery with a veteran's marker noting service with William's beloved "Eagle Regiment."

Poison Green

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The evidence did not hold in court, but it had made the public rightfully wary. More and more people were hesitant to use this color. It also, inevitably, meant that there was notable pushback from the manufacturers who used Scheele Green.

William Morris's resistance to Scheele Green's arsenic components is famously recorded. Owner of the Morris and Company wallpaper manufacturing company, and a prominent figure of the British Arts and Crafts Interior Design Movement, wrote that this "arsenic scare" was akin to "people being bitten by the witch fever." The art historian Lucinda Hawksley, in her book *Bitten by Witch Fever*, notes that: "[Morris] thought because no one was ill in his house from the arsenic wallpaper, it must be something else that was causing the sickness." Morris had to bow down to public pressure eventually and stopped using Scheele Green in the 1870s. Alternative green dyes also started being introduced to the market, such as creating nouveau vert in 1859. Over time, the usage of Scheele Green ultimately died down, a public reaction to the teeming number of deaths caused by this silent killer.

The Second Minnesota Light Artillery Battery is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of Civil War history by living it.

Membership is \$12 per year. Non-member newsletter subscription rate is \$6.00 per year.

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