



2nd MINNESOTA BATTERY

“ACTION FRONT”

Circular No. 340

June 2026

On This Date-165 Years Ago

Excerpted from: American Battlefield Trust

In June 1861, the American Civil War shifted from political secession to active military conflict. Key events included the war's first organized land engagement at Philippi, Virginia, and a decisive Union victory at Boonville, Missouri. Meanwhile, western Virginia counties began organizing to break away and form a new state.

A timeline of major events in June 1861 highlights the conflict's rapid expansion:

June 3– The Battle of Philippi: Union forces successfully launched a surprise attack on Confederate troops in Philippi, Virginia (now West Virginia). The retreat of the Confederates is often cited as the first organized land action of the war.

June 8– Tennessee Secedes: Voters in Tennessee officially ratified an ordinance of secession, joining the Confederacy after a public vote.

June 10– Battle of Big Bethel: Fought in Virginia, this is recognized as the first official land battle of the war in the eastern theater, resulting in a Confederate victory.

June 11– Wheeling Convention: Unionist delegates from the northwestern counties of Virginia convened in Wheeling, initiating the process of breaking away from the rest of the pro-Confederate state.

June 16– Thaddeus Lowe demonstrates the potential of hot air balloons to the government in Washington, D.C.

June 17– Battle of Boonville: Union forces under Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon defeated pro-Confederate Missouri State Guard troops, securing control of central Missouri for the Union.

June 20– Reorganization of Virginia: The Wheeling Convention culminated in the northwestern counties officially resolving to form an independent, Union-aligned state.

Late June– Invasion of Arizona Territory: Texas riflemen commanded by John R. Baylor invaded the western portions of the New Mexico Territory (then considered part of the broader Arizona Territory), claiming the land for the Confederacy.

Upcoming Events

Aug 1 Elba, MN, Whitewater River Fest
1200 S Main Street, Elba MN

This is the usual gun salute to honor veterans, so a gun crew is needed. Contact Daryl or John for more information.

Aug 15-16 Canton Civil War Days

North Bridge Street, Canton, SD

This is a reenactment, this year featuring the Battle of Shiloh. It is hosted by many of the same people who helped with the Pipestone event and those who attended in 2024 (this is an every-other-year event) had a great time. The battle field is beside a wooded creek and many of the camps were along the trails under the trees. The organizers to incredible care of reenactors with wood, water, straw and trash pickup.

Preregistration is required!

Battery members attending must each register on their own and pay the \$10 fee, but you will be reimbursed by the Battery at the event. To register: www.cantonicivilwardays.com

Aug 23-24 Morristown MN – Ahlman's Annual Shooters Roundup.

Our Battery firing demonstrations have historically been voted one of the most popular venues of the weekend. The event is **open from 9:00am – 5:00pm**. We will camp inside Fort Ahlman and provide cannon firing demonstrations at 10:00am 12:00pm 2:00pm 4:00pm both days. More details will be coming.

Next Meeting

June 27, 11:00, Goodhue County Historical Society 1166 Oak Street, Red Wing



Contact Neil Bruce with questions or agenda items.
Phone: (651) 301-9232 Email: nfbrkb@gmail.com

Battery Profiles

Lars B. Foss

Lars Foss was born in Norway on February 2, 1843. He came to Minnesota and began farming in Houston County near Spring Grove. On September 3, 1864, he enlisted for one year with the Second Battery and received a \$100 bounty. He was 5' 7" tall, had blue eyes, light hair and a florid complexion.

Lars served in the Battery until the end of the war when he returned to Minnesota in August of 1865. He went back to Spring Grove and married Randi in 1870. Together, the couple would have eleven children, nine boys and two girls. In the 1885 census, the family was living in Hendrum Township, Norman County, Minnesota.

In 1890, Lars filed for a pension for his Army service. He told the Pension Department he had suffered from sunstroke at Chattanooga, Tennessee, in June of 1865, and again at Philadelphia, Tennessee, in July of that same year. The effects were causing him trouble and a "weakness in the head." The Pension Department didn't believe the problems were service related and denied Lars a pension.

Lars remained in Hendrum for the rest of his life.

On the 24th of October, 1911, Lars decided to make out his will. His wife, Randi, had died in April of 1892, and Lars wanted to be certain his affairs were handled as he desired. His will contained two provisions. The first provision stated that the Commandant of the Minnesota Soldiers Home was to be certain all debts Lars might owe at the time of his death should be paid in full, the funeral paid for, and all to be done as quickly after the death as possible. The second provision was that anything left in his estate was to go to the executor, Lars' son, Bernt L. Foss. The will was signed and filed in Norman County, Minnesota.

It was five years later on May 20, 1915, that Lars died. He was laid to rest in the Immanuel Cemetery two miles north of Hendrum. His tombstone inscription is written in Norwegian.



Ford's Theatre saw more death than just Lincoln's

From the website: [Ford's Theatre Collapse 1893: The Forgotten DC Disaster](#)

On June 9th, 1893, at roughly 9:30 in the morning, a brick support pier in the basement of the old theatre at 511 10th Street NW gave way. Three floors of clerks, desks, ledgers, and Civil War pension files pancaked into the cellar in a single roar. Twenty-two federal workers were killed. At least sixty-eight more were injured. Lincoln died there in 1865 alone in the upstairs box. The Ford's Theatre collapse of 1893 killed twenty-two men in a heap of mortar and broken floorboards.

To understand the disaster you have to know what Ford's Theatre was on June 9th, 1893: it was not a theatre. It had not been a theatre for nearly twenty-eight years.

According to the [National Park Service](#), after the assassination the federal government seized the building. John T. Ford, the original owner, tried to reopen the playhouse on July 10th, 1865 with a production of *The Octoroon*. He sold over two hundred tickets. Then he started receiving threatening letters, including at least one promising to burn the building down if it reopened. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton sent a detachment of soldiers to seize the theatre and turn ticketholders away on the night of the planned reopening. The next day Stanton informed Ford that the federal government had confiscated his building. Ford was eventually compensated, but he never got it back.

Contractors gutted the interior almost immediately. Ford himself stripped out the steel columns that had supported the dress circle and the family circle and shipped them up the road to his Holliday Street Theatre in Baltimore. The presidential box where Lincoln had been shot was dismantled and locked away.

By November 27th, 1865, the renovations were done. The War Department's Record and Pension Bureau moved into the first two floors. The Library of the Surgeon General's Office, with several thousand volumes of medical reference books, shared the second floor. The Army Medical Museum took the third floor in 1867 and stayed for twenty years before relocating to a new building on the National Mall, at which point the Record and Pension Bureau swallowed the third floor too. By 1893 the entire building was paper.

And by 1893 there were over five hundred clerks working inside the old theatre. Per the NPS, all of them were male, politically appointed, and represented dozens of states. *Civil War Times* put the number near five hundred and noted that many of them were Civil War veterans, easy to spot in the rows of desks because some leaned on crutches and others had pinned-up empty sleeves. Their jobs were mostly the unglamorous engine of the postwar federal government: copying muster rolls and pension records by hand, reviewing claims, certifying service. The pension files alone were already among the largest collections of paper the federal government held.

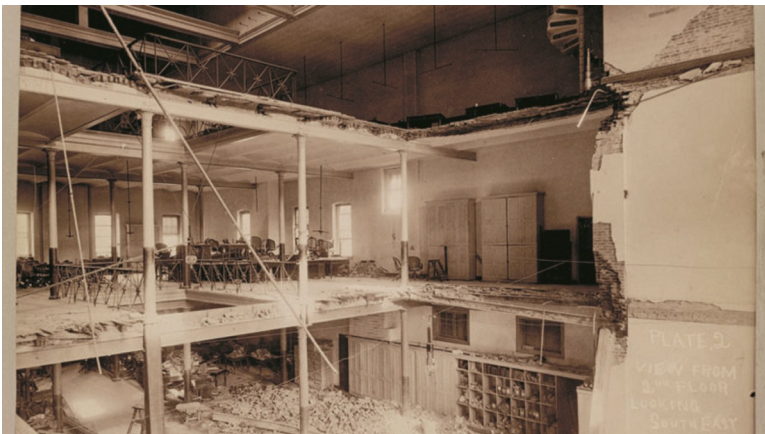
It was, in short, a paper warehouse with people in it. The paper alone was enormous: stacks of muster rolls, bound regimental records, decades of pension claims weighing on Civil-War-era floors that had been knocked together in a hurry in the fall of 1865.

Clerks had been complaining for years. According to the NPS, supervisors released workers floor by floor at the end of the day so the staircase would not be overloaded. Ropes cordoned off parts of the interior because of structural concerns. Plaster fell from the ceiling. There was a noticeable bulge in the east wall everyone could see and nobody fixed. Eight years before the collapse, a congressman had described the building on the record as in "absolutely dangerous condition." Congress did not appropriate funds to fix it.

One clerk, William Mellach of New Jersey, had been so sure the building was going to come down that he

had plotted his own escape route two years before the collapse. According to the New York Tribune on June 10th, 1893, "He always knew the building would fall some day." A small group of clerks had quietly practiced climbing out the windows on pipes and overhangs, then jumping to an awning below.

Then in 1893 Colonel Fred C. Ainsworth, the head of the Record and Pension Bureau, got authorization to install an electric light plant. Ainsworth had been brought in seven years earlier specifically to modernize the bureau, and the NPS notes he had also rolled out heavier workloads and longer hours, which had not made him popular with the men who would later get buried by his light plant. To install it,



contractor George W. Dant's crews had to dig twelve feet down between two partition walls in the basement, right next to the brick piers that held up every post and beam in the building above them.

Friday, June 9th, 1893. Around 9:30 a.m., one of the brick piers in the basement gave way. The columns above it dropped one by one in a domino effect that worked upward through the building. As they fell they let go of the beams and floors they had been holding, which dropped the columns above. A forty-foot section of all three stories ripped out of the wall and hit the basement together. Desks, chairs, tables, pension files, floorboards, and the dead and dying landed in one chaotic heap on the lowest level of the building.

One clerk later described it to investigators as a "rumble like an earthquake," then a "great roar," then a crash "like the end of the world." Another thought a bomb had gone off. A third clerk, Robert Walker, was on the first floor when "massive, wooden beams and bricks mixed with mortar crashed through the first-floor ceiling" above him. He recalled, per *Civil War Times*, "I turned and as I was going over the desk behind me, I was buried...I had no idea how long I was there. I had given up all hope of getting out. The weight was crushing the life out of me and mortar dirt smothering me."

Record and Pension Bureau supervisor Thomas Adams was on the ground floor when it happened. According to *The Evening Star* on June 9th, 1893, in a front-page article headlined "Frightful Disaster, Hundreds of Clerks Buried in a Ruined Building," Adams told a reporter:

"I was on the lower floor in the hallway when the crash came... I heard what sounded like an explosion, and the door slammed together and was so tightly closed that I could not open it. Then came the bricks, timbers and mortar. When the noise was finished I could hear the groans of the injured, and those who were not injured were screaming for assistance."

The same *Evening Star* article described what survivors saw when the dust began to settle:

The two floors had been cut away from the wall as closely as if done with a knife... thirty or forty feet below was a mass of building material, girders, beams and bricks. Inside that mass it was known that there were men.

Men jumped from windows. One slid down the side of the building on a fire hose: a clerk named Ethelbert Baier groped through the dust at the third-floor edge, found that hose, and led about a dozen co-workers down it before the rest of the building could shake itself apart. "There was no premonitory trembling or any kind of warning," Baier told a reporter afterward. "Just a roar and a crash, and the desk and tables seemed to rise up in the centre of the floor, and then disappear in the blinding dust."

The most damning piece of the *Evening Star's* June 9th, 1893 coverage came from a Black laborer who had been working in the basement excavation. He had walked off the site the day before because he could feel the building moving every time someone took a step on the floor above. His statement to the paper:

"I told [my employer] yesterday that the archway would fall, for every time any one walked over the floor it would bend. I tell you I was scared, and got out just as quick as I could. There were twenty men at work with me. 'Deed I don't know what became of them."

The final toll, per the [National Park Service](#), was twenty-two clerks killed and at least sixty-eight injured. Some accounts in the days after the collapse, including the *New York Tribune* on June 10th, 1893, put the toll as high as twenty-three as more bodies were pulled from the rubble. Newspapers across the country printed casualty lists that read like Civil War battlefield reports, which made a grim kind of sense, because many of the dead were Civil War veterans.

A reporter for the *Evening Star* wrote: "As [victims] were brought forth they presented a spectacle that no one seeing it will ever forget. In many cases the semblance of humanity was gone. It seemed as though the helpers were carrying out mere bags of matter, smeared all over with blood, filthy with dirt, dirt ground into them, blood on their faces."

Drugstores and shops on 10th Street became makeshift hospitals. Naval doctors were dispatched on orders from the Secretary of the Navy. The small city morgue ran out of space and a nearby stable was pressed into service. President Grover Cleveland, a short carriage ride away at the White House, sent a personal check for one hundred dollars to the relief fund.

The most stunning rescue of the day was performed by a young Black man named Basil Lockwood. According to Ford's Theatre Society and the *New York Tribune* of June 10th, 1893, Lockwood was somewhere around nineteen or twenty years old when he saw clerks waving frantically from the third-floor windows in the back alley. He climbed a telegraph pole and somehow rigged a short ladder from the pole to a window sill about eight feet away. The ladder did not reach. According to a widely reprinted account from *Oregon's Athena Press* of September 29th, 1893: *Basil Lockwood's brain was equal even to that emergency. He inserted the powerful muscles of his foot and ankle beneath the last round of the ladder, stretched out his leg and this made the other end of the ladder reach the window sill. Then he told the clerks to come over. He was actually strong and steady enough to hold the ladder in its position till 20 men had crossed on it, all that were in need.*

The NPS credits Lockwood with rescuing about twenty men. The surviving clerks of the Record and Pension Division gave him an inscribed gold watch reading "Presented to Basil Lockwood by the clerks in the

Record and Pension Division, in recognition of his heroic conduct in the Ford's Theater disaster of June 9, 1893." They petitioned Secretary of War Daniel Lamont to give Lockwood a job.

It worked. Three months later he was hired as a War Department messenger at fifty-five dollars a month. According to coverage in the *Washington Evening Star*, on June 1st, 1894, Lockwood lost his job seven months after starting it, "among the number of employees dismissed yesterday in the interest of the economy," likely a casualty of the broader Panic of 1893 that was eating jobs across the federal payroll. By 1895 he was working as a waiter in a restaurant at 520 10th Street NW, two doors up from the Petersen House and across the street from the building he had pulled twenty men out of two years earlier.

The investigation moved fast and got ugly. According to the *Evening Star* on June 13th, 1893, in a story headlined "Hang Him! Hang Him! The Demonstration Against Col. Ainsworth at the Inquest," the brother of one of the dead clerks pushed through the crowd at the coroner's hearing, pointed at Colonel Ainsworth, and said in a voice "trembling with passion but which could be heard in every corner of the hall: 'You are intimidating every witness here, and I hold you personally responsible for my brother's murder.'" The hall broke into a demonstration of clerks calling Ainsworth a murderer and demanding he be hanged. Ainsworth, according to *Civil War Times*, sat through it with a revolver in his pocket.

Three days after the collapse, John T. Ford himself, the original owner of the theatre and the man who had managed it the night Lincoln was shot, sent the *Evening Star* a statement defending the building: "*The terms used by many of the press calling the theater a "death trap," an "eggshell," &c., are not to be justified... Associated as my name has been with the property, and assuming all responsibility for the part of it that I built, which at this writing remains intact and unimpaired, I beg the publication of this explanation.*"

The coroner's jury concluded that contractor George W. Dant had failed to properly shore up the brick piers before excavation, and recommended criminal negligence charges against Dant, Ainsworth, the building superintendent, and the engineer. The district attorney quietly dropped the charges against the superintendent and engineer first. Charges against Ainsworth and Dant were dropped after that. Nobody went to prison for the Ford's Theatre collapse 1893.

Ainsworth, who was 41 at the time of the collapse, kept right on rising in the War Department. He went on to become Adjutant General of the United States Army. He died at age 81 in 1934.

The federal government paid five thousand dollars to each family of the dead and between fifty and five thousand dollars to the injured, depending on severity. Many of those injured were never able to work again. Per the *Evening Star* on October 16th, 1893, the Record and Pension Bureau quietly kept the permanently disabled survivors on the bureau's payroll, paying them as if they were still showing up.

Less than a year later, the bureaucrats moved back in. The *Evening Star*, on July 31st, 1894, reported the building had been "Pronounced Safe." Colonel Ainsworth and the surviving clerks returned to their old offices in the rebuilt structure. Several months after that, while at work in the rebuilt building, the clerks on the third floor felt the floor tremble and "this came very near causing a stampede." They knew what that felt like now.

Beyond the immediate horror, the collapse hit federal labor policy hard. *Boundary Stones* notes that the American Federation of Labor and the Knights of Labor cited the Ford's collapse as evidence that the federal contracting system, which gave building work to the lowest bidder, produced dangerous buildings staffed with disposable workers. They called for the government to do its own construction with its own employees. It would take until the Davis-Bacon Act of 1931 for that argument to be partly answered.

The War Department kept using the building as office and storage space until 1928, when it was transferred to the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks. The National Park Service got control in 1933 and ran it as the Lincoln Museum, hosting exhibits about Lincoln's life among the same brick walls where Lincoln himself and dozens of clerks had died.



It took until 1968 for Ford's to become a working theatre again. The interior was restored to its 1865 appearance by Macomber & Peter and Harry Weese & Associates. The 1893 office floors that had killed twenty-two men were intentionally torn out as part of that restoration. If you sit in the Ford's Theatre house and look up at the dress circle, you are looking at a recreation of an interior that was gutted in 1865, replaced by office floors that killed twenty-two men in 1893, and then taken back out to make the building look like a theatre once more.

Recap

Pepin County Museum/Durand Schools

The schools who come for the event at the Old Courthouse Museum in Durand are always great and this year was no exception! We had 101 students, fifth, seventh and eighth grades rotating through our five stations and we all had a great time!

The weather was perfect, warm, sunny, though there was a little bit of wind. The biggest challenge was the noise. Unfortunately, the street reconstruction all around the courthouse block involved lots of large noisy construction equipment and the firing of the gun had to be carefully timed so excavator! The dust from the road crews got a little thick at times and the noise was challenging, but our members managed it all, giving the kids a good day.

The public hours after the kids left was pretty dismal, but parking anywhere near the courthouse was very limited and, again the noise and dust discouraged visitors. But the guys driving the bulldozers and other equipment came to check us out!

We had outstanding participants in the event, including six members of the Garms family! We are so pleased to have them join and participate with us!

Memorial Day, Red Wing

It was 74 degrees with bright sun and a light wind in Bay Point Park at 8:45am when the Red Wing Memorial Day Observance began. Among the Color Guards in the entrance parade were members of the 2nd Minnesota Battery. The program began with an Invocation followed by a flag raising ceremony. This year Neil Bruce was part of the patriotic speeches, reading Logan's Proclamation. Col. John D. McRae, Director of Operations for the 13,000 men and women in the Minnesota National Guard, provided the Main Address.

Following the speeches & musical interludes, the names of forty-nine veterans from Red Wing who passed since last Memorial Day were read.

When the last name was read, our Battery fired its three-round salute. Direct descendants of the Civil & Spanish American Wars conducted their Floral Tribute, strewing flowers on the Mississippi River. As the flowers floated by, the All-Veteran Firing Squad from American Legion Post 54 fired their rifle salute. Echo TAPS was played, and the program ended with a brief Benediction. Battery members participating on the gun crew were Neil Bruce, Ben Garms, Caleb Garms, Ben Norman, Sam Garms, Mikaela Livingstone, James Livingstone, Daryl Duden and John Cain. It was wonderful to have members Leesha Garms, Jayme Garms and Taylor Garms, in 1860's dress, also attend the observance.

Respectfully submitted,
Sgt. Duden



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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