

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“ You should never view your challenges as a disadvantage. Instead, it’s important for you to understand that your experience facing and overcoming adversity is actually one of your biggest advantages.”

—Former First Lady Michelle Obama



FIVE THINGS TO KNOW: NEW YEAR’S TRADITIONS

- 1

Celebrations go way back

Throughout antiquity, civilizations around the world developed increasingly sophisticated calendars, typically pinning the first day of the year to an agricultural or astronomical event. The first day of the Chinese new year, meanwhile, occurred with the second new moon after the winter solstice. The early Roman calendar consisted of 10 months and 304 days, with each new year beginning at the vernal equinox; according to tradition, it was created by Romulus, the founder of Rome, in the eighth century B.C. A later king, Numa Pompilius, is credited with adding the months of Januarius and Februarius.
- 2

Oh, those Romans

Over the centuries, the Roman calendar fell out of sync with the sun, and in 46 B.C. the emperor Julius Caesar decided to solve the problem by consulting with the most prominent astronomers and mathematicians of his time. He introduced the Julian calendar, which closely resembles the more modern Gregorian calendar that most countries around the world use today. As part of his reform, Caesar instituted January 1 as the first day of the year, partly to honor the month’s namesake: Janus, the Roman god of beginnings, whose two faces allowed him to look back into the past and forward into the future.Romans celebrated by decorating their homes and attending raucous parties.
- 3

Celebrations around the world

In many countries, New Year’s celebrations begin on the evening of December 31and continue into the early hours of January 1. Revelers often enjoy meals and snacks thought to bestow good luck for the coming year. In Spain and several other Spanish-speaking countries, people bolt down a dozen grapes, symbolizing their hopes for the months ahead, right before midnight. In parts of the world, New Year’s dishes feature legumes, which are thought to resemble coins and herald future financial success. Because pigs represent progress and prosperity in some cultures, pork appears on the New Year’s Eve table in Cuba, Austria, Hungary, Portugal and other countries.
- 4

Traditions vary

Ring-shaped cakes and pastries, a sign that the year has come full circle, round out the feast in the Netherlands, Mexico, Greece and elsewhere. In Sweden and Norway, rice pudding with an almond hidden inside is served on New Year’s Eve; whomever finds the nut can expect 12 months of good fortune. Some sing songs to welcome the new year, including the ever-popular “Auld Lang Syne” in many English-speaking countries. The practice of making resolutions for the new year is thought to have first caught on among the ancient Babylonians, who made promises in order to earn the favor of the gods and start the year off on the right foot.
- 5

U.S. drops the ball on New Year

In the United States, the most iconic tradition is the dropping of a giant ball in Times Square at the stroke of midnight. Over time, the ball itself has ballooned from a 700-pound iron-and-wood orb to a brightly patterned sphere 12 feet in diameter and weighing in at nearly 12,000 pounds. The first New Year’s Eve party in Times Square actually occurred in 1904, and was a celebration of The New York Times’s new headquarters, the Times Square At the time, the Times tower was the second-tallest building in Manhattan. The celebration involved a street festival that lasted all day, which ended in a show of fireworks. More than 200,000 people were in attendance.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Wisconsin troops celebrated New Year’s Eve in Battle in 1862

BY TOM EMERY
For the Record

New Year’s Eve is normally a cause for celebration. But over 150 years ago, some soldiers from Wisconsin spent the last day of the year preparing for one of the bloodiest engagements of the war.

In 1862, the battle of Stones River opened on Dec. 31, and after taking New Year’s Day off, resumed on January 2. The clash has never garnered the attention of other western battles, such as Vicksburg and Chickamauga. But the casualty totals were among the highest of the war, and a number were Wisconsinites. (1)

The Union Army of the Cumberland and Confederate Army of Tennessee were concentrated around Murfreesboro, Tennessee, about 60 miles south of Nashville, during the last week of 1862, and both planned an attack on the other’s right. But the Confederates struck first and surprised the Federals at 6:22 a.m. on New Year’s Eve. (2)

The battle was complicated by dense thickets crisscrossed by limestone outgrowths, which remain striking features on the battlefield today. Coupled with the intensity of the battle, the woods made for a harrowing experience. A member of the battle-hardened 36th Illinois wrote that “the history of the combat in those dark cedar thickets will never be known. No man could see even the whole of his own regiment.” (3)

Near the Union right around 8 a.m., the 24th Wisconsin, organized only four months before in Milwaukee, struggled just to survive. The final blow was a stirring charge by the 1st Louisiana up a slope littered with boulders, which terrified the 24th. As the colonel of the 24th was ill and the lieutenant colonel had resigned, command had passed to Major Elisha Hubbard, who ordered his

men to retreat by companies. But few heard his calls, and the regiment fled in disorder. (4)

The flight of the 24th exasperated Lt. Robert J. Chivas, who wrote home that “the fact that the 24th Regiment broke and ran, and that a good number of the line officers disgraced themselves, has pained me more than anything else... All the officers of Company C... are cowards and so is the color bearer who rolled up the colors tight and hid behind a tree.” (5)

One of the casualties in the 24th was Sanford Williams, who suffered a severe leg wound and was taken to a makeshift hospital in a log house. An overcoat strap was tied around his leg to halt the bleeding. He wrote that “the roar of the artillery makes the ground shake, and the moans of the wounded mix with the other sounds. It is awful, and they die fast...Hundreds lie outside and have no shelter.” (6)

Williams languished for five days awaiting adequate treatment. He was finally piled on a wagon with other wounded men and bounced 27 miles over bumpy roads to Nashville, where his leg was amputated on January 6. (7)

While the 24th faltered, other Wisconsin units came ready. They included the 5th Wisconsin Artillery and its hardy captain, Oscar Pinney of Monroe, who was unlimbering his guns around 7:30 a.m. The erstwhile Pinney was so excited to join the fight that he nearly fired on fellow Union soldiers, who he mistakenly identified as Confederates in the thickets. But he was forced to withdraw in the face of an advance by Tennessee troops, and was mortally wounded in the leg as he sought men to help drag his last gun. (8)

Then there was the indomitable Hans Christian Heg, the colonel of the 15th Wisconsin, who steadfastly covered the retreat of its brigade in the open-

ing hour of the battle. As the bullets flew around him, Heg found cover behind a small tree. He later came back to the tree and counted five rounds plastered in the trunk. Still, the 15th held long enough to protect the brigade. (9)

New Year’s Day was relatively quiet, but Jan. 2 proved bloody as well. Late that day, Union commander William Rosecrans desperately called for the brigade of Col. William Carlin of Carrollton, Illinois, which included Heg’s 15th Wisconsin. Heg recalled that Rosecrans screamed at Carlin, “I beg you for the sake of the country and for my own sake to go at them with all your might. Go at them with a whoop and a yell!” The division of John McAuley Palmer, a future Illinois governor and third-party presidential candidate, was steadfast as well. (10)

In the aftermath, the 1st Wisconsin Cavalry rode through the battlefield, and the sights struck Lt. James Barnett of Fond du Lac, who was later a doctor in Neenah. Barnett wrote in his journal that the ground was strewn with broken wagons, gun carriages, caissons, and with fragments of shell, grape, and shot...The road was literally lined with the skeletons of mules and horses.” (11)

Stones River was indecisive, but thousands were dead in its wake. The Union lost over 13,000 of 45,000 engaged, while the South lost 11,700 of 38,000. Taken as a ratio per 1,000 casualties, one writer argued that the battle was bloodier than Gettysburg, Shiloh, and Antietam. The 24th was one of the hardest hit, losing 173 of 400 men, including 96 captured, while Heg’s 15th Wisconsin suffered 119 casualties. (12)

Although the Army of the Cumberland developed a new sense of confidence from the brutal fight, it had come at a tremendous cost. As the hapless Williams wrote on Jan.

1, “I wonder if they know at home how we are spending New Year’s Day.” (13)

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Notes to Article

A comment on the name “Stones River”— Depending on the source used, especially for period accounts, the usage of the name “Stones River” varies. Some argue that the proper usage should be “Stone River” or “Stone’s River.” However, I have used “Stones River,” as that is most commonly accepted.

1. Victor Hicken, in Illinois in the Civil War (Urbana, Ill.: 1966), hints at the comparisons of Stones River to other battles. Peter Cozzens, in his preface to No Better Place to Die: The Battle of Stones River, hereafter referred to as “No Better Place” (Urbana, Ill.: 1990), explicitly notes the lack of studies on Stones River as compared to other battles and argues for the importance of Stones River, both militarily and politically. Indeed, it is clear that Stones River has never gained the respect that it should, despite its high casualties and importance in the Western theater.
2. Boatner 803-806; Hicken 106-108; Cozzens, No Better Place, 83-84.
3. Hicken 110; Cozzens, No Better Place, 122. Cozzens, in No Better Place, and countless other writes describe the topography; visitors to the battlefield today can clearly verify the descriptions, as much of the physical landscape has been preserved.
4. Cozzens, No Better Place, 112.
5. Frank Klement, The Civil War in Wisconsin, 2nd ed. (Madison, Wis.: 1997), 82.
6. Klement 82; Robert W. Wells, Wisconsin in the Civil War (Milwaukee: 1962), 49.
6. Cozzens, No Better Place, 151-154; Palmer 96-97; Hicken 116-117; Mark Mayo Boatner, The Civil War Dictionary (New York: 1959), 806-807.
7. Wells 49.
8. Wells 20; Cozzens, No Better Place, 91-92, 94.
9. Cozzens, No Better Place, 100.
10. Cozzens, No Better Place, 191, 220.
11. Wells 50.
12. Battle was draw, Hicken 118, Cozzens, No Better Place, preface; ratio of dead, Hicken 118; regimental losses, Wells 49-50; Klement 82.
13. Wells 49.

TIME MACHINE

Sawyer County through the years

120 years ago

Jan. 3, 1901: Hanson & Hanson’s delivery horse started to run away last Saturday morning, but was captured just as it got under full speed. A broken thill was the extent of the damage done.

Dr. Grafton came down from Leonard’s camp last Friday and returned the same evening. He says all the smallpox cases have recovered but one, and he will probably be discharged this week. The doctor and W. G. Buck have been at the camp every since the disease first made its appearance, nearly two months ago, and the fact that the eighteen or nineteen cases all recovered under their careful treatment and nursing, is surely commendable to both of them.

90 years ago

Jan. 1, 1931: One mother’s heart was made glad on Christmas night when a reunion of the family was held here at the home of the mother, Mrs. Rondeau. Her children, living at Cable and Minneapolis, assembled at the home to remind her that the childhood love for her has grown into that respect for a mother’s love that no other can replace. A Christmas dinner was served after all the family had arrived. Their reminiscence of childhood days and a mother’s worries were recalled with great joys. The reunion was an enjoyable one. It continued until an early hour when the Cable members of the family had to return to their homes. The Minneapolis members of the family left the following day.

75 years ago

Jan. 3, 1946: Pvt. Joseph R. Trepania, son of Mr. and Mrs. Joe Trepania, Sr., received his honorable discharge from the army at Lexington, Kentucky on Nov. 17, 1945. Pvt. Trepania served for 34 months with the sixth Rangers. He spent 25 months overseas, serving in Australia, New Guinea and the Philippines. He participated in three major landings.

Lawrence E. Landgraf, Ph. M. 2/c, is home on a 30-day delayed orders prior to discharge at Wold-Chamberlain field in Minneapolis. Lawrence served for two and one-half years on the U. S.S. Relief Hospital Ship.

Willard J. Woodbeck, son of Mrs. Grace Woodbeck, has recently been promoted from Seaman Second Class to Seaman First Class.

Cpl. Ernest Froemel arrived recently from Fort Sheridan, Ill. Froemel served in Vienna for five months and in Alaska for 22 months. He entered the armed forces in June 1941.

Sgt. George Gorney has returned home following his honorable discharge form the army. St. Gorney was a nose gunner on a B-24, and was ready to leave the States when the war ended.

60 years ago

Dec. 29, 1960: An area dance will be held at the Sand Lake Lodge in Stone Lake on New Year’s Eve. It is sponsored by the Stone Lake Area Fire Department and music will be furnished by the Rhythm Masters. The Chippewa Inn will also feature an evening of dancing and entertainment. A midnight lunch will be served to all guests, with Ann and Otto Willems acting as host and hostess.

50 years ago

Dec. 31, 1970: Hayward Chief of Police Eddie Barnasz is still confined to the local hospital but according to reports, is “improving.” He was injured by an electrical shock Dec. 17 as he was plugging in the street decoration lights. He was taken to the hospital, treated and released, but was returned Dec. 24th for observation and additional treatment.

40 years ago

Dec. 24, 1980: Local bowhunter Robert Dale took a trophy deer on Oct. 16 that proved to have a near-record breaking rack. The animal, dressing out at over 200 pounds, had a 12-point rack. It was determined that the rack earned 165 1/8 Pope and Young points, the second largest ever taken in the state by bow and arrow. The rack itself measured 24 inches along each of the main beams, with the greatest spread of 22 inches. Tip to tip, the inside spread was 17 inches.