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### Was Sullivan Really “Pro-South” During the Civil War?

Thoughts on *Captured Moments*, 2018, Co-authored by Pat Cribbet and Janet Roney, Sponsored by the Moultrie County Historical and Genealogical Society.

There are many attractive features of the new *Pictorial History of Moultrie County, Illinois, Captured Moments*, 2018. The pictures are well chosen and laid out. The narrative that accompanies them is gracefully written. The authors have contributed to the understanding of local history in Sullivan in many ways and over many decades. I am grateful to Janet Roney for providing me information and source documents about Sullivan history in general and the Civil War period in particular.

However, in my opinion Chapter 4 of the new history, which deals with the Civil War period, is deeply flawed. Its theme is that although some sections of Moultrie County supported the Union cause, “Sullivan and residents along Asa Creek were pro-South.” (at 41)

The rest of Chapter 4 is devoted to explaining what “pro-South” means. The authors write that during the War hundreds of Sullivan Democrats called “Copperheads” were members of a secret, subversive group called “Knights of the Golden Circle.” Six hundred Copperheads were members of their local militia. They say that the K.G.C. committed “seditious” acts and “promoted insurrection” in an attempt to help the Confederacy win the War. Copperheads “believed the Confederacy was the true government of the United States and Lincoln’s government was illegitimate.” (at 45.) Though the authors do not use the word “traitor,” by accusing these hundreds of local Democrats of “seditious” acts and promoting “insurrection,” they in effect call them traitors.

There are three fundamental flaws in the picture of Sullivan during the Civil War era drawn in *Captured Moments*:

First, the authors’ claim is largely based on hundred-plus-year-old hearsay, and in important respects is contrary to known facts.

Second, the picture they draw is radically lopsided – focussing on the asserted bad behavior of Democrats and almost entirely ignoring the conduct of soldiers and their Republican allies.

Third, it is radically overstated: the authors (like Republican opponents at the time) treat Democratic criticisms of civil rights abuses and other political differences as treason against the United States.

#### **The Lopsided Picture Drawn by the Authors of *Captured Moments***

The political environment in Sullivan was clearly strained during the War. Hostility and familial bitterness existed on both sides – Republican and Democrat. Insults and name-calling came from both sides. So, occasionally, did violence and intimidation.

The authors buy into the view that the local Democrats were to blame for the hostility and local bitterness. These Democrats were “Copperheads” – poisonous snakes – and “pro-South.” Hundreds of these Moultrie Democrats were allegedly members of the “Knights of the Golden Circle.” Their leaders were not just political opponents. Their purposes and activities were treasonous.

This is history viewed through the distorting prism of Republican Party politics 150 years ago. It was wrong then, and it is wrong now.

History viewed solely through a Democratic prism would be equally wrong. The reality was mixed and complicated; and neither side – at least in and around Sullivan – was composed of traitors.

There did exist in parts of the North an organization of extremist opponents of the Lincoln Administration called the Knights of the Golden Circle (K.G.C.). It apparently morphed into the “Order of American Knights” and then “the Sons of Liberty.” Its founder, one George W.L. Bickley, was in an Ohio prison in 1864. He had served in the Confederate army and was arrested for being a Confederate spy. The secret society had oaths and members. Their objective was victory of the Confederacy over the Union, and they took steps to achieve that objective. Some wanted the southern part of Illinois to be sliced off and made part of a separate Southern country. Others wanted a separate Northwestern Confederacy of states created out of the Union.

The authors assert that the Knights had a “heavy membership” in Moultrie County and were “extremely active.” They supposedly obtained 600 new rifles. Some 800 members gathered to pack cartridges with powder to use in these guns. According to the authors, these hundreds of Moultrie K.G.C. members were a “paramilitary” organization that drilled and trained secretly in the woods, preparing to fight to help the Confederacy win the War. Their activities included burning homes and barns of Union sympathizers, resistance to the military draft and attempting to kill a draft agent, and attacking Methodists.

These claims are presented not as opinion but as facts – not as possibility but as certainty.

### **A Different Picture**

No doubt there was bitterness in Sullivan and Moultrie County between individual Republicans and Democrats, and between some families whose origins were in different sections of the country. Members of the two political parties insulted each other in vile and sometimes violent fashion.

But most local Republicans and Democrats did not differ over whether to support the Union. Only a small fraction of Democrats in Illinois – mostly in the southern part of the state – were members of the Knights of the Golden Circle (K.G.C.). Leaders of both political parties in Illinois and Moultrie County supported the war effort.

Where the parties differed, it was not over support for the Union. It was over what Democrats viewed as civil rights abuses – the closing of critical newspapers, the arrest of civilians without civil trial, the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, the indignities against Democrats

committed by Northern soldiers mostly while on leave, the compelled loyalty oaths, the midnight searches of Democratic homes for weapons or evidence of treason. They also disagreed over the President's Emancipation Proclamation, which Democrats viewed as exceeding the President's authority under the Constitution.

The civil rights violations were not imagined. Some of the story was told in *The Era of the Civil War, 1848-1870*, Arthur C. Cole, Volume III of the Centennial History of Illinois, 1919:

In the late summer of 1863 there took place a wide suspension under executive order of the writ of habeas corpus, the one remaining guarantee of personal liberty. ...

Among the victims of arbitrary arrests for disloyal practice were to be found many persons who in the previous decade had taken a prominent part in state politics. ... In the course of time other state prisoners were rounded up, including W.J. Allen, member of congress, Judge John H. Mulkey, Judge Andrew D. Duff, Judge C.H. Constable ... [and others.] (*Id.*, at 301-302.)

Consider the example of Judge Constable, a one-time friend of Lincoln and a circuit judge who held court in Charleston. In a case involving alleged deserters, the Judge had ordered their release on the ground that the soldiers who arrested them could show no authority for the arrest. The Judge was in turn arrested by army officers and held in jail. Eventually, after a hearing in federal court, he was released. The Judge received death threats. Soldiers in Mattoon compelled him to take a loyalty oath. One source said the soldiers violently dragged the Judge off his wagon and forced him to kneel on the ground and swear allegiance to the Administration. The Republican *Mattoon Gazette* justified the mistreatment by accusing Judge Constable of committing "treason."

The authors of *Captured Moments* say that groups of local Copperheads armed themselves, met in the woods to practice drilling, and engaged in other seditious activities.

Did such drilling by some Democrats occur? Unpublished McPheeters family letters relied on by the authors suggest that it probably did. But how many men were involved? A handful? A dozen? Or several hundred?

And more fundamentally – for what purpose? To protect Democratic meetings and rallies? To prepare to resist the draft – which never happened in Moultrie County? To fight for the Confederacy?

The federal Conscription Act authorizing a military draft was enacted March 3, 1863. There was plenty of reason to criticize the act. It allowed drafted men to avoid service by hiring a substitute to take his place, or by paying \$300. But there is no evidence that local Democrats actively resisted the draft. To the contrary, some local leaders told their followers they must comply with the draft. More to the point, the draft was never implemented in Moultrie County, as volunteers were sufficient to fill the county's quotas.

Moreover, Republican groups did their own organizing and drilling. Groups of local "home guards" – affiliated with larger Union Leagues – were formed by Republicans throughout Illinois. See Thomas Bahde, *"Our Cause is a Common One": Home Guards, Union Leagues, and*

*Republican Citizenship in Illinois, 1861-1863, Civil War History*, Vol. 56, No. 1, 2010, Kent State Press. Three or four such “home guard” companies were supposedly raised in Moultrie County. The Union League held its own meetings in Sullivan.

In any event, there is no evidence that any such organizing and drilling by Democrats were part of a treasonous plan by the Knights of the Golden Circle. One historian who researched and wrote about the Knights was Frank Klement. In his book, *The Copperheads in the Middle West*, published by the University of Chicago Press, 1960, Klement concluded that the stories about the Knights of the Golden Circle were “myths” – a Republican strategy to rouse their political base. “The Republican-constructed myths about Copperhead secret societies served their purposes well. It was a political apparition which appeared on the eve of elections. It was a figment of Republican imagination.” (Klement, at 205.)

Klement totally discredited the theory that the Knights of the Golden Circle were active throughout Illinois. In *Dark Lanterns, Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War*, 1984, he explained how Joseph K.C. Forrest, one of the assistants of Illinois Republican Governor Richard Yates, misused rumors about the Knights of the Golden Circle by composing a false expose of the Knights “to be used as political propaganda.” The *Chicago Tribune* then published “the revelations.” “Forrest’s incredible account relied heavily upon letters (several of them anonymous) that had reached the governor’s desk, four affidavits (each signed with an X by an illiterate), and a report by a Republican serving as a government spy. Forrest’s fertile imagination filled in the gaps.” Klement labelled it “little more than a shameless electioneering document” and described his allegations as “farfetched.” Prominent Democrats denied Forrest’s “fantasies” and called him “a deliberate, studied, and infamous liar” and “foul-mouth calumniator.” *Id.*, at 18-20, 23.

Thomas Bahde, the author of the above-cited work on the pro-Republican “home guards,” agreed with Klement’s “convincing thesis that exaggerated claims of an organized Copperhead threat served Republican political aims during the elections of 1862 and 1864. ... [T]he subversive society bogey-man was a political apparition intended solely to aid Republicans in defeating Democrats at the polls.” Bahde, at 74.

Volume Three of the *Centennial History of Illinois, The Era of the Civil War*, by Arthur Cole, 1919, recites that a commission appointed by the federal district court investigated a number of K.G.C. members in southern Illinois; it confirmed the existence of K.G.C. organization, “but the charge that it was organized along military lines for armed opposition to the government and its policies could not be substantiated.” A state convention was investigated but found “no proof of treasonable intentions.” No participation by Democrats from Moultrie County or Sullivan was reported. (Cole, at 309.)

### **Evidence Cited by the Authors.**

Three principal categories of evidence were cited by the authors for their view that Sullivan was a nest of pro-South K.G.C. seditionists:

First, – hearsay passed on from one generation to another and collected by Carl Crowder of Bethany and Stanley Davis of Sullivan a century after the Civil War. Their two summaries have each been described as one or two pages long.

Second,— a handful of news articles from an openly-partisan Republican newspaper in Mattoon. (Copies of the partisan Democratic *Sullivan Express* newspaper from the war-time era do not survive.)

Third, — a humorous column in the likewise partisan, Republican *Chicago Tribune*, July 26, 1864. It described Sullivan as a sort of “Sleepy Hollow place,” and concluded that the local Democratic Congressman, the county judge, the Clerk of the Circuit Court, the Deputy Clerk, the Sheriff, the editor of the local newspaper and other prominent people were “meditating rebellion”, and were ready to raise “the standard of rebellion” if and when the Union army suffered reverses.

The fourth source, not cited, is the collection of unpublished McPheeters family letters. The family was staunchly Republican, and they didn’t like Democrats very much.

Let’s take the evidence cited by the authors one piece at a time. Then we can look at evidence the authors ignored.

1. In support of their claim that Sullivan was “pro-South” the authors refer to voluntary military enlistments, citing “Adjutant General’s Report; 1860 Census.” Yet the *Moultrie County, Illinois Heritage Journal* for April 2011 provides a long list — spread over 5 pages — of dozens of soldiers in Company E of the 21st Illinois Infantry whose residence was “Sullivan, Moultrie Co. Il.” Other Moultrie soldiers served in other companies.

The 1881 *Combined County History of Shelby and Moultrie Counties* reported several long lists of officers and men from Moultrie county who served in the Union armed forces. See pp. 105-121. “Moultrie county probably furnished more men to the 126th than to any other regiment during the late rebellion.” (116) The lists do not identify which townships the men came from.

My grandfather, I.J. Martin, whose family was Democratic and lived in Whitley Township, had five uncles in the Union army. Two of them were taken prisoner and spent time in a Confederate prison camp in Tyler Texas. That’s just one family. (He also had another uncle who had gone to Texas before the War and was drafted by Texas into the Confederate army.)

Moreover, if sons in some families did not volunteer, that does not mean their families were traitors. It does not mean they supported the Confederate cause or wanted to break up the Union — any more than declining to volunteer for military service in Afghanistan in the decade following 2001 proves that the families of the non-volunteers supported the Taliban.

2. One section of the Civil War chapter is headlined in bold: **THE KNIGHTS OF THE GOLDEN CIRCLE**. Here the authors state that grieving families of Union soldiers were bitter toward pro-South men “who joined the Knights of the Golden Circle, a paramilitary group training secretly in the woods along Asa Creek and the Kaskaskia. ... During the War, the Knights, nicknamed ‘Copperheads,’ harassed Union families, encouraged draft resistance, and promoted insurrection.” (Emphasis supplied.) Six hundred Copperheads served in their local militia.

As stated above, a group called the Knights did indeed exist. It was prominent in Ohio and Indiana, and existed in parts of Southern Illinois. But I know of no substantial evidence that it had any presence in Sullivan or Moultrie County, let alone a militia of 600 members.

The authors quote Carl Crowder in a Bethany "Future Farmers" 1965 article — a 1-1/2 page set of notes" written about 1956, over a century after the War. He wrote: "The south half of the county had a heavy membership in the Knights of the Golden Circle, and this organization was extremely active in the area ... Little is known of their membership lists, but their seditious activities and the burning of homes and barns ... of Union sympathizers during this three-year period left a long trail of memories." (*Captured Moments*, at 43). (Emphasis supplied.)

Crowder provided no citations or authority for his statement. Crowder wrote that he knew "little" about the Knights' membership lists. Apparently he knew nothing about such lists. Apparently there were no such lists. If someone had such lists, they would have been published. What were the sources of Crowder's stories? Apparently century-old hearsay and rumor.

Worse, his statements are nothing more than unsupported generalizations. "Extremely active." "Seditious activities." "Burnings" — but whose homes and barns?

Books written about the Knights of the Golden Circle do not mention any members or activities either in Sullivan or Moultrie County. *Treason History of the Order of Sons of Liberty*, Felix G. Stidger, 1903; *Report of the Judge Advocate General on the Order of American Knights, or The Sons of Liberty*, Joseph Holt, 1864.

The main authority is Frank Klement's book, *The Copperheads in the Middle West*, published by the University of Chicago Press, 1960. He concluded that the stories about the Knights of the Golden Circle were "myths" — a Republican strategy to rouse their political base. "The Republican-constructed myths about Copperhead secret societies served their purposes well. it was a political apparition which appeared on the eve of elections. It was a figment of Republican imagination." (Klement, at 205.) In a later work, *Dark Lanterns*, 1984, Klement explained in detail how Joseph K.C. Forrest, one of the assistants of Illinois Governor Richard Yates, misused rumors about the Knights of the Golden Circle by composing a false expose of the Knights "to be used as political propaganda."

The principal book on the history of Moultrie County and Sullivan is the *Combined History of Shelby & Moultrie Counties*, 1881. It says nothing about supposed K.G.C. activities, Copperheads arming and drilling in the woods, preparing to do battle for the Confederacy.

The authors of the new Moultrie County history brush off the 1881 history on the ground that "wounds were still raw" when that book was prepared. But raw wounds would have been a reason for the authors to report any such treason — not hide it. A simpler and more likely explanation is that there was no such large-scale treason to hide.

So: Were some Moultrie Democrats practicing drilling in and around Sullivan? Probably some of them were.

Were there several hundreds? No evidence.

Were they members of the Knights of the Golden Circle? No evidence.

Were they traitors – supporting the Confederacy and break-up of the Union? No.

3. The authors cite an article in the *Mattoon Gazette* which said: “It has been believed for months past, that the Knights of the Golden Circle have well organized lodges in Moultrie” and other counties. “ ... has been believed ...”? The *Mattoon* editor did not even say he believed it. But he continued: Two Whitley Point men, William Waggoner and Jos. Trimble, were preparing to move to Mattoon because of threats “by the K.G.C.” They were reportedly told – by some unnamed men – they would be shot “if they were not able to *give the sign* in two weeks ....”

The *Mattoon Gazette* was a frequently-intemperate pro-Republican political newspaper – the Fox Network of its time. They weren’t alone in being political. The *Sullivan Express* was a frequently-intemperate anti-Republican political newspaper – the MSNBC of its time. Unfortunately, issues of the *Express* survive only from the pre-war period – not the War itself. Both papers, like the parties whose interests they represented, specialized in hurling insults at each other. Republicans and their newspapers accused Democrats of being “Copperheads” – poisonous snakes – and traitors. Democrats and their papers accused Republicans of being “Abolitionists” and n-lovers, using a word that can’t (or at least shouldn’t) be used today.

At political rallies, political speakers entertained their audiences by insulting their opponents, the more vicious the insults the better. Members of the audiences shouted “hit him again!” Are all such insults and political charges to be treated 150 years later as an adequate factual basis for drawing conclusions about what really happened?

It is certainly possible somebody threatened the two Whitley Point men. But who? And why? What’s the evidence that the men making the threats were K.G.C. members? Or that they were part of a wider plot to help the Confederate cause?

If it happened, it was likely a local, individualized incident – but certainly not evidence of a broad-scale attempt by Sullivan Democrats to commit treason or help the South win the War.

Maybe Trimble let his pigs get into his neighbor’s yard.

4. The authors cite A. Gammill, another resident of Whitley Point, for the proposition that he received threats of injury if he kept going to Abolitionist meetings. Abolitionist meetings in heavily-Democratic Whitley Township?

Andrew Gammill, a resident of Whitley Township, was a respected man. He had two sons in military service during the War. The family was Republican. *Portrait and Biographical Record of Shelby and Moultrie Counties, 1891*, at 343.

We have no idea what was said to Gammill, or who said it, or what the circumstances were, or how serious it was, or whether it was said in jest in a tavern after a few drinks.

These threats — if that's what they were — fall extraordinarily far short of evidence that there was a "heavy membership" of "extremely active" K.G.C. members engaged in sedition in Moultrie County, training and working to aid the Confederate cause.

So far as I know, there is no solid publicly-available evidence that *any* Democrat in Moultrie County was a member of the K.G.C. or a supporter of their seditious or treasonous activities.

5. The authors say, "Copperheads began drilling openly and held torchlight parades through Sullivan and Windsor."

Democrats surely did gather and have political meetings and rallies, just as Republicans did. But the authors are not talking about a meeting or a parade. They speak of an "estimated six hundred Copperhead militia members." (Emphasis supplied.)

Who? Where? When? Six hundred — all Copperheads — all militia members? "Estimated"? The claim reminds me of Senator Joseph McCarthy's infamous "list" in 1950 of supposed communists who had infiltrated the United States Government.

And most important — Why? What was the purpose? It's no surprise that Democrats, like Republicans, held meetings and parades. There are indications that some Democrats drilled. It's far from clear that hundreds were involved.

But if some number did drill, so what? What was their intent? To help the South win the War? Or to prepare to defend themselves, in more or less the same way the Republican partisans were organizing "home guard" units to defend themselves?

6. In 1862 a Methodist preacher in Sullivan was threatened by "a Copperhead" for being an abolitionist. What did the threat consist of? Who made it? What were the circumstances? Is this more hearsay passed along several times over 150 years? Part of the general animosity between Methodists (then largely Republican) and members of the Christian and Baptist congregations (then largely Democrats)?

7. Also a Methodist named Bridewell saved a Republican "about to be stabbed with a pitchfork by a Copperhead ...." Who? Where? When? And why?

Threatening Methodists is evidence of hundreds of K.G.C. members organizing to overthrow the Union?

8. "Copperheads" posted a sign prohibiting soldiers in uniform on the square. This time there is a citation — to Stanley Davis, County Circuit Clerk.

Stanley Davis was not around 150 years ago. He was circuit clerk in the 1960s — a century after the incident involving soldiers on the square. He certainly didn't witness the posting of any such sign. Who told him about it?

Moreover, it appears that Davis did not write down this accumulated hearsay himself. He passed it along to Leland Glazebrook, who then wrote it down in a short memo.



How did the story originate; who handed it on to whom – orally? How many times was it handed along till it got to Davis? And then Glazebrook? How many opportunities for mistakes or distortions? Or fiction?

Moreover, even if the story is taken at face value, what does it show? Animosity toward on-leave soldiers? Perhaps evidence that some people were mad at some soldiers for pushing civilians around?

“Evidence” of this kind would not get a citizen convicted of a traffic violation today. How can it be enough to charge (as the *Tribune* did) an entire town or several hundred Sullivan citizens – including many of the prominent Sullivan elected office holders – over a century ago with section or promoting insurrection?

9. One of the main episodes cited by the authors is the so-called “Charleston riot” that occurred in Coles County on March 28, 1864, in which several people were killed. The riot occurred in Charleston – not Sullivan. But that’s just a detail. They say Congressman John R. Eden was in town that day to speak at a rally of “Peace Democrats,” and that soldiers were attacked by “Copperheads.” (Full disclosure: John R. Eden was my great-grandfather.)

The authors got this one terribly wrong.

John R. Eden was not a “Peace Democrat” or “Copperhead” as the authors use the terms. He supported the war effort. There was no rally of Peace Democrats or Copperheads that day in Charleston. John R. Eden did not speak that day and was not the cause of the riot. It was not a riot about politics at all.

John R. Eden, while serving in Congress, voted for appropriations to pay the troops and support the war effort to defeat the Confederacy. Like Senator Douglas, his hero, he supported the Union in his speeches. Democrats criticized the Administration for infringing civil liberties and for inefficient conduct of the War, but they did not promote insurrection or support the Confederate cause. They did not interfere with the military draft.

The Charleston riot was a fight started in a saloon between (a) a small group of soldiers who were not on duty – many were on furlough – and were not citizens of Charleston, and (b) a group of locals, mostly Democrats. Most were apparently under the influence of alcohol.

Peter Barry, a retired U-I Professor and Charleston native, wrote a book about the riot. *Charleston, Illinois Riot*, 2007. He concluded that it was “a violent, localized fight that was ignited by personal animosities and driven more by alcohol, emotions, and grudges than by political passions and patriotism.” (Barry, at 70.) One of the roots of the riot was the practice of Union soldiers, usually on furlough, of roaming the streets of Charleston and Mattoon, accosting known Democrats, forcing them to their knees and compelling them to swear to support the Lincoln Administration and all its proclamations. (*Id.*, at 28.)

No evidence suggests that Democrats from Moultrie County had anything to do with the Charleston riot. No evidence suggests that the rioters were trying to help the Confederacy or to overthrow the Union.

The authors quote a sentence from a letter written by John R. Eden after the riot, saying that the affair was “terrible.” But they do not quote the rest of the letter, in which Eden provided evidence for Barry’s conclusion that the riot was caused by alcohol, emotions and personal grudges rather than any speech of Eden’s (he didn’t speak) or any treasonous activities by K.G.C agents:

I reached Charleston between one and two o’clock and stopped there, no more apprehensive of danger than I now am. When at Mattoon I heard from citizens and soldiers that the soldiers at Charleston were to come to Mattoon on the next train, which would leave Charleston between two and three o’clock. ... When I went up to the Hotel at Charleston I saw that there were a good many people in town and a very considerable number of soldiers, many of whom were drunk. The word there also was that the soldiers were to leave there on the next train going west. As soon as I got my dinner I went over to the court house. On the way I saw that there was a good deal of excitement and heard that a number of citizens had been badly abused by the soldiers during the day. When I went in to the court house, the court being in session, I told my friends that owing to the excitement I did not deem it prudent to speak. ...

Eden’s letter makes it clear that the riot was not a treasonous act of K.G.C. agents intent on undermining the Union.

10. One of the authors’ more sensational claims is that in July 1864 –

Moultrie County’s Copperheads purchased six hundred Smith and Wesson breech-loading rifles and eight hundred men gathered to pack cartridges with powder furnished by the county judge. (Emphasis supplied.)

Wow! 600 new rifles and 800 Copperheads packing cartridges. And the county judge was Joseph Eden, a brother of John R. Eden, the “Confederate Congressman” and supposed instigator of the Charleston riot.

For this proposition – the 600 rifles and 800 men packing cartridges – the authors rely on the *Tribune* column of July 26, 1864. It said the men did all that cartridge packing “in a room over Banks’ store” opposite the square. All those hundreds of Copperheads packing cartridges in a single upstairs room. And the floor didn’t collapse.

But the Trib piece they rely on was not a news report. It was a humorous, ironic column written by a *Tribune* correspondent who was having some satirical fun. The authors of the county history misread it as a serious news story.

The Trib columnist entitled his article: “The Village of Sullivan – Sleepy Hollow outdone – Copperheadism in Moultrie.” It is “by all odds the dullest and most uninviting place I have yet encountered in my wanderings.” “A couple of women standing upon the porch of a dilapidated dwelling, washing, each with a pipe in her mouth and clad in homespun, was the first evidence of animated humanity that greeted my eye ...” The Sullivan main street could only be called a street “by some sort of poetic license.” Women smoking their pipes indeed.

“Not even the whisky shops, of which there are at least a dozen, furnished an exception to the general quiet... It seemed as if the entire community was engaged in a sleep to which that of Rip Van Winkle scarcely deserved to be considered a parallel.”

The Trib columnist evidently hoped he might become the next Washington Irving.

Then the Trib columnists moved on to identify the leaders of the Sullivan Copperheads:

“I drove my horse to the ‘tavern,’ kept by Jo. Eden, brother of the Confederate Congressman ... The proprietor of one store was stretched full length upon the counter; the owner of another was playing checkers with his clerk; ...

“The inhabitants of Sullivan ... are mainly Copperheads; not the hybrid, who, professing fealty to the Union in one breath, and uttering treasonable words in the other, flourisheth in the latitude of Chicago, but outspoken and rebellious Copperheads, who cheer for Jeff. Davis as regularly as they take their coffee; who would sooner hang an Abolitionist than say their prayers of a Sunday morning; who openly sport the butternut badge of fealty to the Southern Confederacy; who drill regularly twice a week in a secluded grove in Moultrie, and who are actively and earnestly engaged in preparing for the coming outbreak.” (Emphasis supplied.)

Sleepy, lazy, whiskey-sodden Sullivan rebellious Copperheads drilling regularly – twice a week! – in their secluded grove?

“There were three hundred of them [during the celebrated Coles county riot]; and there are more now. Each man is armed with a breach-loading Smith & Wesson rifle, besides revolvers and knives. These rifles have been recently procured ... Quite recently six hundred improved rifles of the above make have been purchased, and each man belonging to the organization is required to own one. If he can not get it otherwise he sells his last cow.” (Emphasis supplied.)

“In March last the Copperheads to the number of 300 met in this village to make cartridges in a room over Banks’ store, from powder furnished, it is said, by Jo. E. Eden ....”

Cheering for Jeff Davis ... and sooner hang Abolitionists than pray on Sunday? It’s a work of humor, not investigative reporting! The author had just come to town. Who knows what he’d heard at the tavern, but he surely had not been out in the country observing Knights drilling twice a week in their secluded grove.

Any reader who takes the 300 “rebellious Copperheads” seriously must take equally seriously the bits about cheering for Jeff Davis, and “fealty” to the Confederacy, and hanging Abolitionists, and about being required to buy a rifle or “sell his last cow.” Oh yes, ... and about John R. Eden being a “Confederate Congressman ...”

(By the way, the Trib columnist wrote that 300 Copperheads had made the cartridges with powder. He did not say 800 men were packing the cartridges, as the authors say at p. 44. But then again – if you can make it 300 without evidence, might as well make it 800.)

Then the Trib writer blasts away at the Copperhead leaders. John R. Eden – “self-made ... rude eloquence ...not at heart a bad man ... a good neighbor.” Then A.L. Kellar, a doctor and

Christian Church preacher – “formerly Colonel of a Copperhead regiment numbering from four to six hundred ...” Then Joseph E. Eden, brother of the Congressman – Judge, “keeps tavern ... no great shakes.” Then Arnold Thomasson, Clerk of the Circuit Court, John Meeker, Deputy Clerk ... J.H. Snyder, the Sheriff ... and John Perryman, the editor of the Copperhead Express ... a humbug of the first order.”

(The Trib wasn't nearly as severe on Perryman as the Republican *Mattoon Gazette*, which called him “a third-rate blockhead” who produced “a filthily printed five-column sheet, principally filled with matter calculated – if uttered by men of any influence – to injure the Government.” August 19, 1863.)

All these Sullivan leaders, the Trib says, “are meditating rebellion.” If Northern armies suffer reverses, “I firmly believe the standard of rebellion will be raised in this as well as the adjoining counties.”

Satire? Humor by exaggeration? Sure, ... or at least maybe. To be taken seriously as news? As the truthful reporting of facts? All these elected Sullivan officials and leaders, including a Christian Church preacher, were traitors, actually plotting rebellion?

The writers of the new Moultrie history treat it as serious news. It was not – any more than Sleepy Hollow and Rip Van Winkle were news. One might as well believe in the “Headless Horseman.”

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A young Democrat who came with his family to Moultrie County in 1861 at the age of 18 was Charles Shuman, later a successful and much-admired Sullivan banker and businessman. Before Moultrie, the Shuman family had lived in nearby Edgar county. Before that they had lived in Kentucky. Hmm. Lived in Kentucky? Age 18 when he came to Moultrie County? That's military age. And a Democrat? He didn't volunteer?

Worse: He was selected in 1882 by the Democrats to fill the office of county clerk, which he did until 1890. One of the young men he hired as a deputy was young I.J. Martin, the Whitley Democrat. Later they worked together to produce the Democrat-leaning Sullivan *Progress* newspaper, the descendant from the *Express*. Martin always respected Shuman, his partner and friend.

Q. Could Charles Shuman, a Democrat, have been a secret member of the K.G.C. and a supporter of insurrection during the war?

A. Could have been. But he clearly wasn't. Just because he was a Democrat and had once lived in Kentucky and did not volunteer for the Union army – those facts fall extraordinarily far short of proving he was a Copperhead or supporter of the Confederacy. There's no evidence that he was a member of the K.G.C. or a traitor.

Q. True – but there's no evidence that any other Sullivan Democrat was either!

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11. The writers say that Jacob Hancock murdered George Livers in a tavern on November 14, 1864, because he wanted to kill a draft agent — part of a larger attack by Copperheads on the draft system. Without saying so directly, they also hint that the burning down of the Sullivan courthouse 11 days after the murder was somehow connected to the killing. All part of the Copperhead or Knights of the Golden Circle treasonous conspiracy?

There are a few little factual problems with this claim:

- There was no evidence that Hancock, the killer, was a draftee.
- There was no evidence that the victim, Livers, was a draft agent; indeed, the trial showed that he was the bartender — not a draft agent;
- There was no evidence that the man Hancock apparently sought to kill was a draft agent either;
- There was no evidence the draft had anything to do with the murder. The draft was apparently never mentioned in the trial record. The trial record said the shooting was accidental: “the gun had a tendency to go off half-cocked.”
- There isn’t even any evidence that a draft was underway in Illinois or Moultrie County in November 1864 — *or at any time during the War*. Illinois and Moultrie County filled all their military quotas through voluntary enrollments. When the War was coming to an end in the spring of 1865, Illinois was considering the possibility of a draft if voluntary enrollments did not fill the quotas; but the War ended before any such draft was necessary.

Hancock, the killer, was apparently drunk at the time of the killing. There’s no dispute about that. So the killing may have been no more than a drunken act of violence — very far from the act of a conspiratorial agent of the K.G.C intent on undermining the Union by disrupting its draft system.

And the burning of the courthouse 11 days later? The authors do not state that Copperheads did it. Yet there’s a hint that the burning was somehow related to the murder. As one of my Sullivan historian friends once wrote to me: “It does give one pause to ponder the possibilities, especially since the night-riding Copperheads were burning barns and homes of ‘abolitionists.’ Why not burn down the courthouse where Hancock was being held prisoner awaiting trial? What better way to show opposition to the draft ... one of the main motivations of the Copperheads?”

### **Evidence Relied on But Not Cited by the Authors**

The unpublished McPheeters family letters, though not cited as authority, are clearly part of the basis for the authors’ conclusion that Sullivan was full of treasonous Copperheads and K.G.C. members. The letters (a few of which I have read) are part of the basis — albeit hearsay — for the claim that hundreds of Copperheads were drilling in the woods southeast of town. The

family no doubt has good reason to keep the letters private. But it is hardly sound historical practice to release selectively those letters which seem to support one's thesis, but withhold others which may not.

In any event, far from supporting the authors' treason thesis, one of the McPheeters letters directly undercuts it. A letter of Addison McPheeters, September 6, 1863, states: "The Copperheads lately had a mass meeting in Sullivan. Ficklin & Anthony Thornton were the speakers. ... Thornton told them that they must submit to the draft, that if they attempted to resist it by force of arms, that the government would overpower them, that they would stand precisely as the rebels in the south do and that it would be impossible for them to cope with the force the government would bring against them ... "

Thornton was one of the main Democrat leaders. Here he is, telling his Democratic audience that they must comply with the federal draft act. He was elected to Congress the following year, 1864. Yet the authors view Sullivan as dominated by traitorous Democrats carrying out the Knights' agenda of destroying the Union?

The McPheeters letters amply illustrate the bitter animus against Democrats which warped the writers' ability to distinguish political opposition from sedition. The local leaders of the Democrats were not traitors. Criticism of the Administration was not sedition.

One example of the McPheeters' animus is the letter of Addison McPheeters Jr., March 13, 1863 – Re Copperheads: "I have no mercy or forbearance with such men, shooting is too good for them. They should die the death of a felon."

Another is the letter of Addison McPheeters, July 9, 1863 – "The union party had a grand celebration at the Camp ground. There was a very large crowd .... [Little hard to reconcile that with the authors' statement that "Sullivan" was "pro-South."] The Copperheads also had a celebration in Sullivan. A large number came armed with their guns, and drilled near the Fair Grounds. ... Dr. Kellar mounted on a horse, being apparently in command, as he gave the words of command. ... Eden & Kellar "claimed that under our constitution every man had a right to free speech and a free press, and that all the arrests that had been made by the military were direct violations of the constitution. ... Now it is true that every person has the right to write and publish what he pleases, and it is equally true that if he slanders his neighbors, that he is liable to punishment, and as neither our constitution nor laws gives the right to be a traitor, if any person becomes such either in time of peace or war, it is not only right but it is the duty of our government to arrest and punish them for it."

So if the Republicans hold a big celebration and march, it's "grand." If the Democrats hold one, it's criminal. John R. Eden may have the right to speak, but if he "slanders his neighbors," then he should be arrested and punished.

The McPheeters sons who served in the Union Army provided noble service to their country. Their family was justly proud of them. But bitter animus on the part of some family members led them privately to elevate political disagreements into lies, and political opposition into the promotion of insurrection.

\* \* \*

After the War, I.J. Martin, a Democrat, was a business partner — co-owner of the *Sullivan Progress* — of McPheeters son-in-law, Charles Shuman, another Democrat. In his *Notes on the History of Sullivan*, I.J. Martin wholeheartedly endorsed the work of the Citizens' Party in Sullivan civil life and praised the "active and effective leaders of the party. Capt. Rankin McPheeters was one of the best ...." Charles Shuman was "equally valuable." (at 66.)

### **Evidence the Authors Left Out.**

The authors include one brief paragraph about fear going "both ways." They refer to one story in which Copperheads were beaten in Mattoon, and another in which a young lady was frightened by a "Union foraging party ...."

But the authors left out the civil rights violations, the night raids by furloughed soldiers on homes of Democrats, and the forced pledges of allegiance to the policies of the Lincoln Administration. These were reported by I.J. Martin, a historian of both Moultrie County and Sullivan, and elsewhere. I.J.'s published writings about the Civil War era were not even mentioned by the authors. What he wrote was inconsistent with their theme.

I.J.'s folks were Democrats — but not Confederate sympathizers, and certainly not members of the Knights. He had five uncles who volunteered for service in the Union army.

I.J. Martin acknowledged that there were some "Copperheads" in the county but he wrote that their membership was "not large." As he (and most people) used the terms, all Democrats were not "Copperheads," and being a Copperhead did not equate to membership in the "Knights." I.J. Martin wrote that an investigator (suspected of being a rebel but perhaps a federal government spy) failed "to find any sympathy for a plan of armed resistance."

In 1863 and the early part of 1864, there was a rather bitter feeling between Democrats and Republicans — both sides suspected the other. What was known as the 'Copperhead' organization had *some adherents*, although the membership was *not large* in Moultrie County.

The irritation was increased by a few night raids by the soldiers who visited Democratic homes collecting guns and sometimes taking the men to Mattoon to be questioned. ... These raids were always made about midnight, and were naturally very much resented. No one was ever prosecuted, and no charges were ever made.

In the summer of 1863, there was in central Illinois a man who claimed to be a Copperhead official who called himself 'Colonel Powderhorn.' Some of the Democrats suspected him of being a rebel agent and his actions seemed to point that way, especially when he proposed the purchase of a supply of arms. *Failing to find any sympathy for a plan of armed resistance*, he finally went away and it was not until long afterward that it was learned that he was a government spy. (Emphasis supplied.) Martin, *Recollections of the Civil War*.

It is worth pausing over these passages. I.J. Martin was from a Democrat family in the south part of the county, where the authors say the K.G.C. support was concentrated. His family was strongly pro-Union. He wrote extensive notes on the history of both Sullivan and the County – published notes which the authors did not mention. He wrote that the Copperhead membership was “not large” – and he did not refer to any membership or support for the Knights. Even more to the point, he wrote that a supposed federal agent “failed to find any sympathy for a plan of armed resistance ...” He also remembered that in the Martin home, “the name of Jeff Davis was anathema.”

The authors of our new history likewise included nothing about the speeches and political career of John R. Eden and other prominent Democrats who made it clear that they supported the Union. As Eden said on the floor of the House of Representatives, February 27, 1864, the government was “duty bound to suppress insurrection.” He said:

I am a friend of the Union; my love for it is so strong that I am not willing to give up a single State. When I see a hand raised to strike down and blot out a single star from the flag of my country, whether the blow be directed by the traitor in arms or by a more insidious enemy seeking to effect the same and by undermining and subverting the Constitution, I will interpose my feeble efforts toward off the blow. I would save the Union ....

Another local Democratic leader who supported the Union and opposed law-breaking by thugs in either party was Judge Anthony Thornton, a prominent lawyer of Shelbyville. Thornton later succeeded John R. Eden as Congressman from the district that included Shelby and Moultrie Counties. Like Eden, he supported the Union and the military effort to put down the Confederacy. If there was to be a draft in Moultrie County (which there wasn't because of the sufficiency of volunteers), he was opposed to any resistance.

If Sullivan was dominated by the Knights of the Golden Circle, and if hundreds of Sullivan Democrats promoted insurrection against their country, why did Moultrie Democrats nominate and elect men like Eden and Thornton – men who supported the War and opposed law-breaking – to Congress in 1862 and 1864?

### **To sum up:**

Sullivan Democrats as well as Republicans volunteered for military service during the War.

Sullivan's Democratic political leaders and elected officials, including Congressman John R. Eden, supported the Union military effort to suppress the Confederacy.

Some Sullivan Democrats – like their Republican counterparts – may have armed and drilled; but there is zero evidence that hundreds did so to support the Confederacy. Mutual self-defense is a far more likely motive for the preparations of both groups.



Although there were sporadic acts of reported violence and intimidation, they apparently occurred on both sides. There is zero evidence that any such acts by Democrats were part of a broader treasonous K.G.C. plot.

The remarkable thing is that during this period of wartime and political controversy, there were not more incidents in Moultrie County of murder and violence.

Local Democrats did not obstruct the draft. Volunteers filled the quotas for Moultrie County. There was no draft in Moultrie County during the War.

Sullivan Democrats were political opponents of the Republican Administration – not traitors. Their concerns about civil rights violations were legitimate. President Lincoln shared their doubts about the constitutionality of the Emancipation Proclamation. That's why we have the Thirteenth Amendment.

There is zero evidence that hundreds of Sullivan Democrats were members of the Knights of the Golden Circle.

More local injury and damage were likely caused in Sullivan by alcohol and sunburn than by Sullivan K.G.C. agents cavorting in the woods.

The evidence now available strongly supports a conclusion diametrically opposed to that of the authors: Sullivan was not "pro-South" during the Civil War.