



BICENTENNIAL BULLETIN No. 33 **—Sheffield Celebrates 200th Birthday**

The Sheffield Bicentennial Commission will issue a *Bicentennial Bulletin* each Monday throughout 2015 that illustrates the rich heritage of our communities. **View them at — www.sheffieldbicentennial.org or sheffieldvillage.com**

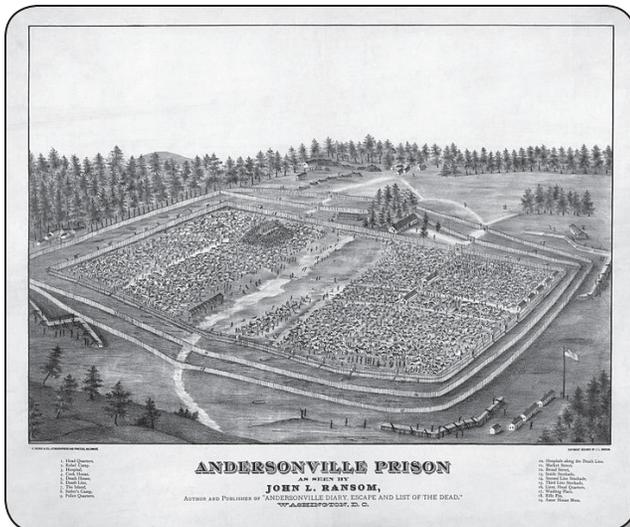
MARIA ROOT (1829-1888)—angel of the Civil War

Maria Root was born on November 27, 1829 in Sheffield, Ohio, the daughter of William H. Root and Sara Case. Her parents lived along the lakeshore at the foot of what is now Root Road. When she was young woman, her father built a grand Greek Revival-style house there that was home to Maria for the rest of her life. Maria died in 1888 at age 59.

At the close of the Civil War, Maria Root and Delia Day left Sheffield and traveled to Georgia to care for freed Union prisoners of war at Andersonville Prison that were to weak to travel home. During the 15 months that the prison was in operation, 45,000 Union soldiers were imprisoned there, behind a wooden stockade with no shelter and little food and water. In that span of time, 13,000 Union soldiers died, several being shot by the commander himself. In May 1865, Federal forces under General William Tecumseh Sherman captured Andersonville during his famous *March to the Sea*. The condition of the prisoners still alive there was appalling.

General Lewis “Lew” Wallace, who was instrumental in the defense of Washington, D.C. during the Civil War, was given a memorable assignment at the end of the War—he was appointed presiding officer at the war crimes trial of Confederate Major Henry Wirz, the commander of the prison at Andersonville. Major Wirz was found guilty and hung in Washington, D.C. on November 10, 1865 in sight of the Capitol Building—the only Confederate officer to be hung for war crimes.

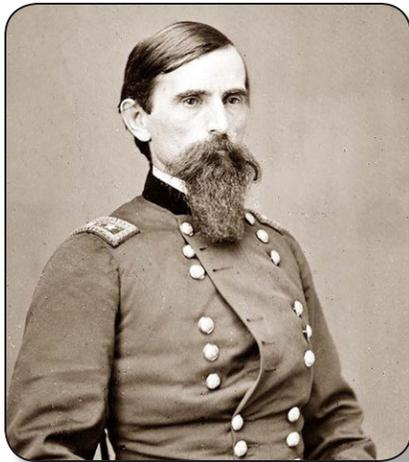
Andersonville Prison (February 1864-May 1865)



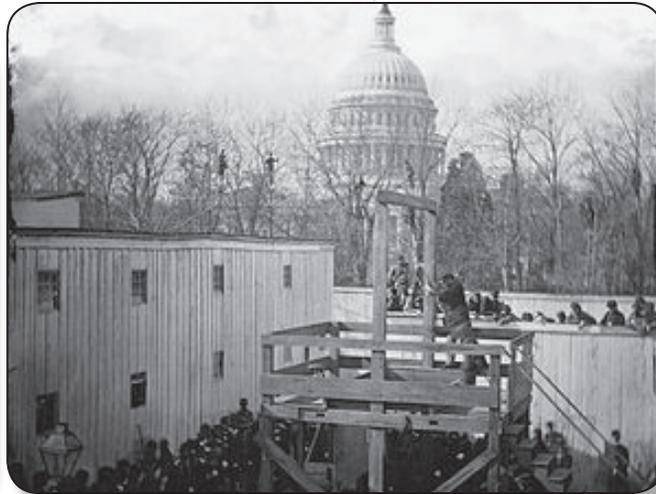
Federal prisoners at Andersonville



General Lewis Wallace, presiding officer at the war crimes trial of Confederate Major Henry Wirz



Execution of Major Wirz by hanging on November 10, 1865



Major Henry Wirz, the commander of the prison



After the war, General Wallace served as Governor of the New Mexico Territory, where he confronted Billy the Kid in 1879 and advised him to give up his “perilous career.” The Kid’s actual name was Henry McCarty. He was born November 23, 1858 in New York City and shot to death by Marshal Pat Garrett in July 1881. Lew Wallace went on to write perhaps the most influential religious story of the nineteenth and twentieth century, *Ben Hur—A Tale of The Christ*.

When their work at the prison was done, Maria and Delia stayed on to serve as teachers for the Freedmen’s Bureau at Macon, Milledgeville, and Andersonville—pioneers in this missionary work of the South that grew into a factor of untold influence. During the Reconstruction Period (1865-1872), the U.S. Congress established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands to provide practical aid to the 4,000,000 newly freed black Americans in their transition from slavery to freedom.

Major General Oliver O. Howard headed the Freedmen’s Bureau, considered the first federal welfare agency. Despite handicaps of inadequate funds and poorly trained personnel, the Bureau built hospitals for, and gave direct medical assistance to more than 1,000,000 freedmen and distributed more than 21,000,000 rations to impoverished blacks and whites in the South. The Bureau’s greatest accomplishments were in education—more than 1,000 black schools were built and it granted over \$400,000 to establish teacher-training institutions. All major black colleges received funds or other aid from the Bureau.

Delia Maria Day, daughter of Norman Day and Julia Ann Root, was born on July 3, 1831 in Sheffield. She was a cousin of Maria Root. When she returned from the South, she married Judge George Steele of San Luis Obispo, California on May 19, 1868. Judge Steele was a member of the California State Convention in 1877-1878. He served one term as a member of the State Legislature and two terms in the State Senate. He died in October 1901 and Delia died on February 20, 1912.

Elaine Hibbard, Ricki Herdendorf, and David Hibbard (left to right) holding a piece of stockade wood from the Confederate prison at Andersonville, Georgia. David’s great aunt, Maria Root, helped Union prisoners recover there after the Civil War and brought back this stockade artifact

