

Area re-enactor brings Civil War lore to life for local Archaeology Society

By LARRY SEE JR.
Messenger Staff

His name was Stephen Burbridge and he was hated.

Despite the fact that Union Gen. Burbridge was praised by fellow officers at the battles of Arkansas Post and Vicksburg, he barely managed to escape his home state following the close of the war.

Author and Civil War re-enactor Bryan S. Bush offered this information to members of the Meade County Archaeological Society on Burbridge during their Oct. 6 meeting.

Burbridge was born Aug. 19, 1831, in Georgetown, attended the Kentucky Military Institute and later was appointed to command the Military District of Kentucky.

Burbridge's first order was to protect citizens in Owen County and break up area guerilla bands.

"When he took over Kentucky, Gen. Sherman gave him some advice on how to deal with the guerillas," Bush said.

"On July 5, 1864, martial law was declared in Kentucky," Bush said, adding Burbridge thought that meant desperate measures for those who disobeyed.

According to Bush, any property of those caught and who were believed to be Rebel sympathizers was sold, with the funds used to repay the government. In addition, he said, many innocent people were shot.

At least four of them, registered Confederate soldiers, were executed in Meade County, Bush said. A Union Army firing squad shot them and eyewitness reports indicated they had "their arms folded across their chest and died without a groan."

Local citizens reportedly took care of the bodies.

Burbridge also issued "Order No. 59," which stated if anyone was convicted of being treasonous, they would be shot.

That was the case in Lexington, Frankfort and other places, Bush said.

"All in all he executed 60 people and some of them feared for their own lives and



Photo by Larry See Jr.

Civil War artillery re-enactor Bryan S. Bush, seated at table, signs one of his many books following his Oct. 6 presentation at the Meade County Archaeological Society. Bush related the story of "Butcher Burbridge" a guerilla soldier who was hated throughout Kentucky.

wondered who would be next," Bush said.

He said Burbridge also took all horses and contraband he could lay his hands on, adding he sought to control the state by the order's issuance.

Burbridge even went so far as to exclude one name from being written in the poll books, adding he wanted a different man elected.

The order caused the incumbent, Alvin Duvall, to flee the state to avoid arrest.

In that election, only 11,000 people cast ballots, Bush said, adding the order demoralized the citizens.

Burbridge's "reign of terror" didn't stop at the ballot box. In October 1864, he issued another order requiring local farmers sell their cattle to the government, despite the fact there was a one to two cent price decrease.

"There were permits required to drive the cattle to markets and guards were stationed along the Ohio River to

prevent farmers from selling them in Indiana," Bush said.

Burbridge's order was revoked, but he denied any involvement, Bush said.

Burbridge was later replaced by Maj. Gen. John Palmer of Illinois, causing lo-



Library of Congress photo
Gen. Stephen Burbridge in an undated photo.

cal newspapers to rejoice.

Burbridge resigned his command on Dec. 1, 1865, six months after the armies had concluded the war at Appomattox.

"He turned out to be the most hated man in Kentucky," Bush said. "But the matter of fact was he was only carrying out the orders of his superiors."

Burbridge later left Kentucky and settled in New York City, where he lived for the remainder of his life. He died in 1886 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Bush told members a typical guerilla would wear Civil War clothing, carry a knife and "would be armed to the teeth."

"They also had several coats," he said. "And they rode in bands of four to six men. The next book I'm working on is on guerilla warfare in Kentucky."

Guerillas weren't recognized by the Confederate or

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Union forces, Bush said.

Kentucky, due to the fact it was a neutral state, sometimes had family members fighting on both sides of the conflict.

"John Hunt Morgan was not a guerilla," Bush said. "He had orders from the Confederate Army. It was all okayed by the Confederates and he was paid a salary."

Guerillas were often termed a "ragged band" of men who would rob and plunder whenever they could, Bush said.

"But they would not take on a well-seasoned Army," he said. "They would sometimes kill their own kind, especially if there was any kind of money involved. Most of the guerillas stayed within a six-county area, or in the areas they knew best."

Bush, a Louisville resident, has consulted for movie

companies, written numerous articles for various Civil War publications and is an active artillery re-enactor.

He is an honors graduate of Murray State University with degrees in history and psychology.

The society also is expected to participate in the upcoming River Heritage Bluegrass Festival Oct. 18 with a display and plan several fall field trips.

One visit is the location of a 200-year-old stone building,

reportedly used by slaves as a kitchen and the other is a visit to five Confederate cemeteries.

The society meets on the first Monday of each month from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in the Meade County Public Library annex.

Meetings are free and open to the public.

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