

In a recent pictorial history of Moultrie County, *Captured Moments*, 2018, the authors assert that during the Civil War Sullivan was “pro-South” and that hundreds of local Democrats called “Copperheads” were members of a secret, subversive group which committed “seditious” acts and “promoted insurrection” in an attempt to help the Confederacy win the war. They claim that a local Democratic lawyer, John R. Eden, instigated a riot of Copperheads in Charleston, and that his brother, Joseph Eden, a Sullivan merchant, hosted a cartridge-packing party for hundreds of Copperheads in his tavern across from the Sullivan court house. This theory of the authors is unsupported by the facts, as shown in *Fragments of the History of Sullivan, Illinois*, 2018, at 367, et seq.

A recently-discovered newspaper article in the *Decatur Decatur Herald*, August, 29, 1906, confirms that John R. Eden, one of the leaders of the local Sullivan Democrats during the Civil War, was not “pro-South.” Along with other leading Sullivan Democrats, he did not favor a Confederate victory. To the contrary, he recruited troops for the Union army.

It was the fall of 1862. President Lincoln had called on the Northern States to enlist soldiers for the Union armies. Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, had questioned the President’s war aims. President Lincoln replied to Greeley on August 22, 1862, in a letter that was printed in the *Tribune* and widely publicized throughout the North. Lincoln wrote:

I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored; the nearer the Union will be "the Union as it was." If there be those who would not save the Union, unless they could at the same time *save* slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time *destroy* slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle *is* to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do *not* believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do *less* whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do *more* whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views.

I have here stated my purpose according to my view of *official* duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed *personal* wish that all men every where could be free.

John R. Eden, then a young Sullivan lawyer, was running in that fall of 1862 for the central Illinois 19th Congressional district that included Moultrie County. Local authorities were recruiting young Moultrie men for a new Illinois regiment. John R. Eden went to Bullards Point in Moultrie County to encourage the young men there to enlist.

Four decades later, in a ceremony at Freeland Grove in Sullivan, near where the Sullivan Civic Center now stands, John R. Eden — then 80 years old — spoke to a reunion of old soldiers and settlers about the events of 1862. A large crowd (“almost the entire population of Sullivan turned out ...”) was in attendance for his August 1906 speech, including J. H. Crowder of Bethany.

I went and the regiment was raised. I spoke on the letter of Lincoln, [apparently referring to Lincoln’s letter to Greeley of August 22, 1862] which had brought down a storm of criticism by those of the ultra minded, and told them that the Republicans had in part gone back upon their old friend [Lincoln] and that it was the part of the Democrats to fall

into the breach and support the man who would free their land. The result was that every man enlisted was a Democrat and I did not lose a vote [in the Congressional race]. With a tribute to the faithful of the Moultrie county boys in which he said that not one of them ran except toward the enemy.

Eden's speech was reported in the *Decatur Daily Herald*, August 29, 1906. The newspaper report appears below.

A few weeks after his Bullards Point recruiting talk in 1862, John R. Eden was elected to Congress, the first of his five terms. John R. Eden would not have misrepresented what he said in his 1862 recruiting talk to his audience in 1906, many of whom (including J.H. Crowder, a sturdy Republican) were old enough to remember events in Moultrie County during the Civil War era. Moreover, it is inconceivable that Eden's recruitment effort among Democrats in Bullards Point would have been so successful ("every man enlisted was a Democrat"), or that Eden could have been elected to Congress with strong Moultrie Democratic support, if Sullivan — or most Democrats in Sullivan — had been "pro-South" in 1862.

In 1906 Eden paid tribute to the Moultrie County soldiers — "not one of them ran except toward the enemy."

The "enemy" was the Confederacy. Sullivan was not "pro-South."

OLD SOLDIERS AND SETTLERS AT SULLIVAN

Hold Reunion On Spot Where Lincoln and Douglas Had Memorable Debate.

Sullivan, Aug. 28.—The old soldiers and settlers of Moultrie county met this afternoon in **Sullivan** in what purports to be the greatest of the annual reunions. The old and young alike perceptibly brightened and stepped lighter as the "old boys" of the drum corps led with the music dear to all in the sixties. Some of the boys were gone but those remaining were more enthusiastic, if possible, because of the fact that they were becoming fewer as the years increased. The people of the whole country gathered to welcome first the old soldiers and second the old settlers. The meeting was one of great pleasure to all, and was made the occasion of starting even greater enthusiasm for the all day session which occurs today.

that brought the silent tear and hard grip of the hand. The fires with their red glow gave a setting just as in the old war day and the old song, "Tenting Tonight," was sung with a fervor that tells of the spirit that lies only dormant in the man, who has heard and experienced the rasp of the steel, and felt the sting of the bullet. The old comrades adjourned with wishes for a great day today, when the settlers will gather to celebrate in greater numbers with the soldiers.

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concluded by the male quartet with songs of the old times.

J. R. Eden Speaks.

The speeches made by the old comrades were those that appealed to the assembled audience, as only those coming from the men that were in the front could. John A. Jennings was to have spoken, but was detained. Representative John R. Eden was asked to fill the vacancy, which he did with a zest that did all good. He spoke as one having the authority from the fact of former participation in the features that he detailed. He fixed the attention of the crowd in the introduction of the subject of General U. S. Grant, leader of the regiment to which nearly all present belonged.

"I was then in the house of representatives, where this, the Nineteenth, district saw fit to send me the fifth time, when the subject of making Captain Grant a lieutenant general came up. I heartily endorsed it, my dear friends, and he got there, and if he hadn't the war would not have come to the timely successful close that it did. I was in congress when he started the movement that resulted a year later in the capture of Richmond. I was within the sound of the guns at the battle of the Wilderness, and, most sorrowful feature of all, I was there when the ambulances came in.

Raising a Regiment.

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Raising a Regiment.

"Those incidents are some of them sad but the humorous will appeal in the saddest of times and it did then. In 1862 I was again candidate for congress, when some were trying very hard to raise a regiment at Bullards Point just within the county line. I wanted the boys to go to the front but also wanted their votes. Colonel McCarty met me one day and said that the democrats had been trying to raise a regiment in that section but had miserably failed, and that I must go and raise the men. I went and the regiment was raised. I spoke on the letter of Lincoln, which had brought down a storm of criticism by those of the ultra minded, and told them that the republicans had in part gone back upon their old friend and that it was the part of the democrats to fall into the breach and support the man who would free their land. The result was that every man enlisted was a democrat and I did not lose a vote.' With a tribute to the faithful of the Moultrie county boys in which he said that not one of them ran except toward the enemy. The speech to the people was concluded with the pathetic incident of old Dan Burr, the Mexican war veteran, who would year after year call the roll at the reunions, calling the names of both living and dead, until at last the old man stood up and performed like duty when not a voice answered, but without a falter the old veteran did his duty, they all have done it my friends. We who have received the benefit of their labor should see that first, last and all the time that an old soldier never be at the door of hunger."

Camp Fire.

The evening was the...

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