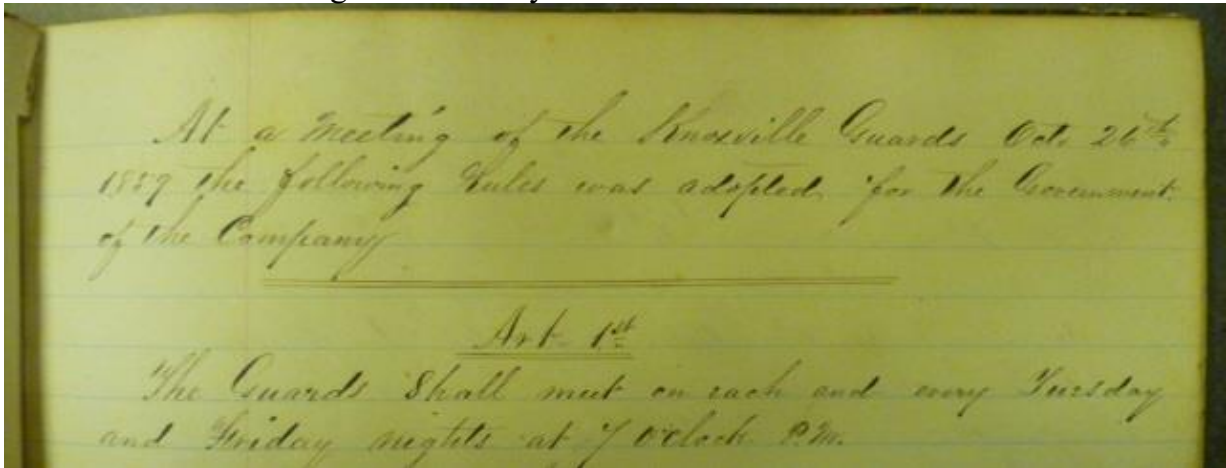


## Rediscovering the Minutes of the Knoxville Guards

By Dennis D. Urban

The Knoxville Guards is the only known militia group formed in Knoxville. The Guards was organized in late October 1859 during a time issues surrounding the abolition of slavery, succession, and even war fever permeated the country. Such sentiments had been brewing for decades. In those days, a local militia group was a military, fraternal, and civic organization designed to assist in keeping the peace during times of civil strife and upheaval. The reason for the formation of the Guards is unclear and the minutes of the organization offer no explanation. I was previously researching the Knoxville Guards based on a dance card in my collection for a military ball hosted by the Guards at the Lamar House on Washington's Birthday 1861.



First Page of Knoxville Guards Minutes Book

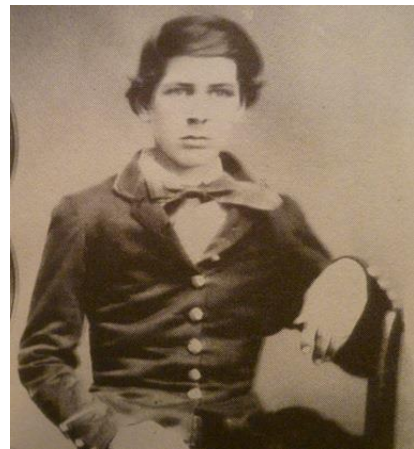
The 1996 book edited by Daniel E. Sutherland, *A Very Violent Rebel, the Civil War Diary of Ellen Renshaw House*, led me to attempt to determine the exact location of the home of Ellen (ERH) and her family during the Civil War. I ascertained that her hand-written diaries were in the collection of the East Tennessee Historical Society. I requested the original diaries in hopes that they would aid in my research. Sitting in the small research room behind the third floor front desk, I began to look through the two marble board covered journal books ERH used as her diaries. She began her diary on Thursday, January 1, 1863 in the back pages of one of the journals. **I was astounded to read that the beginning pages of the journal ERH used were the minutes book of the Knoxville Guards!** I couldn't believe what I was seeing. The minutes of the Guards are contained in the approximate first 20 pages of the journal beginning with their first October 26, 1859 meeting through their final meeting on April 23, 1861. Thus, the minutes were not lost but remained undiscovered for many years. I wondered how Ellen House came to possess this remarkable record of the Guards. The answer became clear as I read through the minutes.

When Sutherland penned his book, he apparently worked from a House family transcription of ERH's diaries and not from her original manuscript. In his Acknowledgements section in the front of the book he as much as says so. In footnotes he makes two references to the leadership of the Guards. But this information was taken

from other sources. It seems he was unaware of the journals containing the minutes of the Guards.

Curiously, there is one year of meeting minutes missing from the journal. These pages were cut out from the front pages of the journal ERH began on January 1, 1863. The extant notations in the remaining left margin portion of the cut pages show that these were minutes pages of the Guards. These eight pages appeared to be removed before ERH began her diary. In the existing margin of the first cut page can be seen six surnames as well as the titles of officers, each on a separate line; Captain, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt., 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt., 3<sup>rd</sup> Lt., O.S. (Orderly Sergeant). May 10<sup>th</sup> is written on top of the 5<sup>th</sup> removed page and June 14<sup>th</sup> is on the top of page 8. The year is undetermined. Clearly, these pages were part of the minutes of the Guard meetings. The surnames may represent new members voted into the Guards and the officer notations may be names of those newly elected to positions of authority. The reason for their removal remains a mystery.

These journals contain, to my knowledge, the only known history of the Guards. Information in the journals include their articles of formation, their twice weekly meetings, and their several elections of officers. The minutes even describe the uniform adopted by the group. ERH possessed these journals because her younger brother, John Moore House, called Johnnie by Ellen, was the last recording secretary of the Guards. He kept these journals at home where they remained when the Guards were offered into Confederate service in late April 1861 after the surrender of Fort Sumter and after Johnnie enlisted.



**Johnnie in Guards Uniform**

The Knoxville Guards became Company E of the 19<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Infantry (CSA). Johnnie enrolled as a private for 12 months on June 4, 1861 at Knoxville. A company generally consisted of 100 soldiers. Company E contained 106 enlistees from Knoxville and the surrounding area including Concord. To date, thirteen members of the Guards are identified as members of Company E. By the summer of 1863, Johnnie was recognized for his leadership and served as a Lieutenant on the staff of General Alexander P. Stewart. Johnnie was serving in this assignment when captured at the Battle of Missionary Ridge on November 25, 1863. As a Confederate officer, he was incarcerated at Johnson's Island, Ohio. His war was over. He was released in June 1865.

Johnnie briefly returned to Knoxville but soon went into business in Nashville with a friend, William Ewing. In late November 1865 while they were traveling south of Nashville on the Franklin Pike, they were accosted by robbers and Johnnie was mortally wounded. After being notified, ERH and her father left Knoxville by train to be with Johnnie. Unfortunately, he passed away before they reached him. ERH wrote, "We could not bury him where he could not live." So Johnnie was laid to rest in a family plot in Marietta, GA next to a young brother who had died as a child. ERH never got over the death of her beloved brother. A few years later, after she married and had her first child, a girl, she named the child Johnnie.

Sources: Diaries of Ellen Renshaw House, East Tennessee Historical Society;

*A Very Violent Rebel, the Civil War Diary of Ellen Renshaw House*, 1996,  
Daniel E. Sutherland, University of Tennessee Press;  
Various research sources by Dennis D. Urban