

February, 2005

421st Meeting

Vol. 26 #6

Tonight's Program:

Stonewall in the Valley

In March of 1862, a Union army, the largest force ever assembled on the American continent, prepared to descend on Richmond. Two months later, McClellan's mighty Army of the Potomac hovered menacingly on the outskirts of the Confederate capital. Few in either the North or South expected the Confederacy to withstand the fall of Richmond, when, on May 28, a dispatch from the Shenandoah Valley reached the beleaguered city. It read: "During the last three days, God has blessed our arms with victory." The dispatch was signed "Major General T. J. Jackson."

One of the most brilliant operations of military history, Jackson's Valley campaign was a strategic diversion to draw strength from McClellan's advance on Richmond (Peninsular campaign). The Shenandoah Valley was important to the Confederates as a source of provisions and as a route for invading the North. Jackson once said, "If this valley falls, Virginia falls." Indeed, its fall in 1864 put extreme pressure on Lee in 1865. As far as the Federals were concerned, the Valley was not a suitable invasion route; however, it was important that they deny its use to the enemy.

Bob Boyda will analyze Jackson's campaign, its successes, failures, and its impact on the Peninsula campaign and Washington.



Tonight's Speaker:

Bob Boyda

Bob Boyda is a chemical engineer for ABB Group, a leader in power and automation technologies. He has been a member of the Round Table since 1994 and served as president in 2000. Bob is fond of saying that, for any business problem, there is a Civil War analogy. His favorite involves John Bell Hood at Spring Hill, Tennessee, when he failed to block the road, allowing the Federals to slip by them. As Bob says, "If it is that important, you better see it for yourself."

**Date: Wednesday,
February 9, 2005**

**Place: The Cleveland
Playhouse Club
8501 Carnegie Ave.**

**Time: Drinks 6 PM
Dinner 7 PM**

**Reservations: Please Call
JAC Communications
(216) 861-5588**

**Meal choice: Oven Roasted Cod
or Club Salad**

CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

FOUNDED 1957

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Editor - THE CHARGER - Dan Zeiser

Cleveland Civil War Roundtable Past Presidents

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2002 Bill McGrath	1978 Richard McCrae
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1999 Dick Crews	1975 Thomas Gretter
1998 John Moore	1974 Nolan Heidelbaugh
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1996 John Sutula	1972 Bernard Drews
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1981 Thomas Geschke	1957 Kenneth Grant

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

FEBRUARY, 2005

Karen Sandstrom, book editor of the Plain Dealer, called our January program the "War of Words" - and what a war it was. Great works were presented by enthusiastic debaters, who valiantly defended their choices with answers to probing questions. When the smoke cleared Jon Thompson ("The Killer Angels") was declared the winner - the best of the best. Congratulations to Jon and our thanks to everyone who participated in this memorable event.

This month we will visit the Shenandoah Valley with Bob Boyda as he presents "Jackson in the Valley." Next to Nathan Bedford Forrest, past president Boyda admires "Stonewall" more than anyone. Expect to see a different kind of presentation and learn more about the pious, eccentric, and brilliant general who Lee called his "right arm."

Our featured wine for the raffle will be "Bob Boyda Chenin Blanc." We will also have some other items and books to attract your raffle dollars. We will also continue to sell tickets for the Lincoln Bicentennial poster - proceeds to a preservation cause. Abe Lincoln will pull the winning ticket in April.

I learned just before our last meeting that Harold Holzer will not be able to be with us in May due to the press of new duties with his day job at the New York Metropolitan Art Museum. I am working on a replacement now.

From time to time some of us give talks to various groups besides our own - I am giving a talk on Lincoln this month to a church group - so I thought it would be good to organize our speakers and their talks as part of our Round Table. My thought is to have anyone interested in being a member of our "CCWRT SPEAKERS BUREAU" contact me with a brief bio and a list of the talks you give. We will add a Speakers Bureau page to our website that would be available to groups seeking speakers. (Our thanks to William Vodrey for the \$100 honorarium he received for his last outside talk.)

Beginning this month, some of the items unearthed by Dr. Bush and his crew on Johnson's Island will be on display at the Rutherford Hayes Center in Fremont - well worth the short trip.

See you on the 9th...

Mel Maurer

**CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE
2004/2005 SCHEDULE**

September 8, 2004



Lincoln and Douglas

**Voices of the
Civil War:
D o u g -
las, Lincoln,
and Echoes on
the Prairie**

George Buss

October 13, 2004

**Henry
W.
Halleck**



John Marszalek

November 10, 2004

**Winfield Scott
Hancock**

**Dan
Zeiser**



December 8, 2004



**Ghosts of
Gettysburg**

**Neil
Glazer**

January 12, 2005

The Great Debate

*Which is the best book, fiction or
non-fiction, on the Civil War?*

Moderator: William Vodrey

February 9, 2005

**Stonewall
Jackson in the
Valley
Bob Boyda**



March 9, 2005

**Myths of
Shiloh**

**Tim Smith
Shiloh National Park Historian**



April 13, 2005

**Abraham
Lincoln
Portrayed by
Jim Getty**



May 11, 2005

**U. S. Grant Seen
and Heard**

Harold Holzer



The Vigilantes of Montana

By John C. Fazio

Previously, I have argued in these pages that the decisive battle of the Civil War was not Gettysburg, as so many assume (though its critical importance cannot be denied), but Spotsylvania and Grant's literal turning south that preceded it after his defeat in the Wilderness. My point was that the rolling twelve day slugfest that was Spotsylvania demonstrated to Robert E. Lee both the unprecedented doggedness of the new commander of the Army of the Potomac and the terrible arithmetic that spelled the doom of the Confederacy, that is, Grant's ability and Lee's inability to replace losses. But, lo, a new candidate has emerged and it is none other than the mighty battle that took place in what is today a thriving metropolis of slightly more than one hundred souls and resulted in the deaths of (are you ready for this?) twenty-one men! in (are you ready for this?) Virginia City, Montana! Virginia City, Montana? I am daft, you say. Maybe... Maybe. And you have not even heard the punch line. The punch line is that



none of the twenty-one (and we have all of their names) died in battle. They were murdered in what can only be described as a terroristic orgy that bypassed anything and everything resembling due process -- no trials, no judges, no juries, and not even death in the usual manner, hanging, but, so as to get the maximum deterrent effect from each murder, by strangulation.

What on earth could possibly account for the extrajudicial strangulation of twenty-one men and what on earth does it have to do with the Civil War? The answer lies in one word: gold! What else but that shiny yellow metal that has always been equated with power and, because of its beauty, scarcity, and that it neither corrodes nor tarnishes, has driven men (and women) batty for all time and, since circa 700 B.C., been used as money and, therefore, to underwrite the economies of great states and empires. Here, briefly, is what happened.

It need hardly be said that nations need liquid wealth to wage war, particularly protracted war. Not worthless paper, but paper backed by tangible wealth, or the wealth itself, is necessary to manufacture weapons, build the facilities for their manufacture, and equip and supply armies and navies with whatever they need to carry on the struggle -- clothing, food, vehicles, ships. Gold meets that need more than any other form of wealth. Because of its intrinsic qualities -- beauty, portability, malleability, etc. -- it is in demand by virtually everyone and thus serves as an international medium of exchange. At the beginning of the war, the Federal government had the liquid wealth, mostly gold, necessary to wage protracted war. The Confederate government had very little. To be more precise, the Confederacy had, at the beginning of the war, perhaps \$20,000,000 in gold and silver, mostly from loans, bullion confiscated from U.S. mints, coins confiscated from U.S. Custom Houses and mints, and the suspension of specie payments by southern bankers, who then turned their coins over to the Confederate Treasury. (By the end of the war, the Confederacy had \$156,000 in gold and silver, all of it in the posses-

sion of Jefferson Davis's party when he was captured.) Federal greenbacks, therefore, had substantial value and maintained most of it throughout the war. Confederate paper money had little value and even less as the war dragged on. That would certainly have been different had the Confederacy been able to place its hands on a good supply of gold. It almost did.

When the war began, Montana, then part of the Dakota Territory, was almost vacant. As the war progressed (regressed would be more accurate), settlers of every variety and origin, including many from the South, moved in, first to the western slope of the Rockies (present day Idaho) and then to the eastern (present day Montana). The lure? Gold, of course. It was discovered in 1861 in the area of Mullen Road, in 1862 in Bannock (present day Idaho City, Idaho), and in 1863 in Virginia City, originally named Varina City for Jefferson Davis's wife, later changed to Virginia City as a concession to the secessionist majority by a territorial officer from Connecticut.

The Lincoln administration, of course, recognized the critical importance of assuring that all this gold flowed into Federal coffers and not to the Confederacy. How much gold? In Virginia City alone, \$600,000 worth of gold was being mined every week. In today's dollars, that is \$18,000,000 per week. By some standards of measurement it could be the equivalent of \$30,000,000 per week or \$1.5 billion a year. The Federal government thus took immediate steps to preserve this immense wealth. It established, in the spring of 1863, a new political entity known as Idaho Territory, comprising the present states of Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, with its capital at Lewiston. Lincoln then appointed W. W. Wallace as Governor of the new Territory and his friend, and one of the founders of the Republican Party, Sidney Edgerton, as Chief Justice. The latter arrived in Bannock (sometimes spelled Bannack) on September 17, 1863 with his family and a nephew, Wilbur Fisk Sanders. They were originally supposed to travel to Lewiston, but went instead to Bannock, which was only seventy-five miles from Virginia City and its gold. Edgerton and Sanders's problem was that they had to accomplish their purpose -- the preservation of the gold for the Union -- in what was essentially enemy territory. They did so by arranging for the creation of a Vigilance Committee, also known as the Vigilantes, in Bannock and Virginia City. The Vigilantes eliminated any and all threats to the flow of gold to the Federal government, which is a nice euphemism for saying they murdered a lot of people. It worked. The gold flowed to the Federal government, thus maintaining the value of greenbacks at home and abroad and producing the means to accomplish westward expansion, i.e., to populate the west with Union sympathizers. The Homestead Act of 1862 had already begun the process. Later, the Union-sympathizing emigrants to Montana Territory came in substantial numbers from St. Paul, Minnesota, protected by U.S. troops led by Captain James Liberty Fisk, who had also journeyed to Washington to impress upon Lincoln the importance of controlling the gold flow. This emigration was financed by the United States Congress for obvious reasons. The effect was the desired one.

Within a few months, Edgerton realized that preserving the Virginia City gold for the Union could not be effectively done from Lewiston, which was too far away and separated from the gold by nearly impassable mountains, and that Montana would therefore have to be established as a separate territory. He traveled to Washington to make his case. Lincoln saw the wisdom of it immediately, and thus it was that Montana Territory was established on May 26, 1864 with Sidney Edgerton as its first Governor.

How did Edgerton and Sanders succeed, with secessionists all around and outvoting them and their Republican allies whenever there was access to a ballot box? In a word: terror! With the Vigilantes, their field commander, James Liberty Fisk, their hatchet man, i.e., their

"unit commander," Sergeant James Williams, and a sadistic executioner names X. Biedler, who delighted in strangling rather than hanging his victims, Edgerton and Sanders carried the day for their Commander in Chief. The Vigilance Committee was formally established by Paris Pfouts, Nick Wall, Wilbur Fisk Sanders, Alvin V. Brookie, and John Nye. Before long, the Committee had more than one thousand members, almost all of them Republican Masons. Almost all of their victims were non-Mason, Democrat secessionists. Paris Pfouts was an anomaly. He was a Missourian, with stops in Denver and Salt Lake City, where he signed an oath of loyalty to the Union. He was a Mason. He was also an avowed secessionist. How was it, then, that he was a member -- indeed, a founder -- of the Committee? That he was a Mason probably had something to do with it. Probably, too, his loyalty oath had something to do with it. But my guess is that the conundrum is best explained by his seeing where the real power lay and choosing to be on the winning side for his ultimate gain. That he became Mayor of Virginia City supports this theory. In any case, the Committee called their enemies "villains" and, to galvanize the population, invented the myth of the "secret society of road agents" -- robbers and murderers who, tipped off by townspeople in league with them, waylaid innocent travelers, murdered them, and made off with gold shipments.

In fairness to the Vigilantes, they have their supporters, a vociferous group who contend that the story about the road agents was not story, but fact. Worse, the normal channels of law enforcement were not available to them because the Sheriff of Virginia City, Henry Plummer, a Democrat from Maine, was the secret leader of the road agents! This belief, in fact, is accepted today by most of the residents of Virginia City and most Montanans. Needless to say, Plummer met the same fate as the others, strangulation. The controversy as to the verities of the road agent hypothesis still rages after one hundred forty years. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that most of the public bought the story -- enough, in any case, to assure the success of the Vigilantes and thus of Edgerton and President Lincoln's mission, despite the sympathies of the great majority of the settlers. It is arguable that this success -- accomplished not by votes and due process, but by appointed officers and terror -- won the war for the North. In fact, it has been stated, categorically, that "Virginia City gold won the war for the North" and "The Civil War and the entire Union cause depended to a very large extent upon the gold that flowed east from Virginia City." These appear to be overstatements, but perhaps they are not. We know what an incredible fight the South made of it, despite serious shortfalls in men and materiel. Imagine a Confederacy with all of that gold and the ability to purchase everything it needed, if not from Yankees, then abroad.

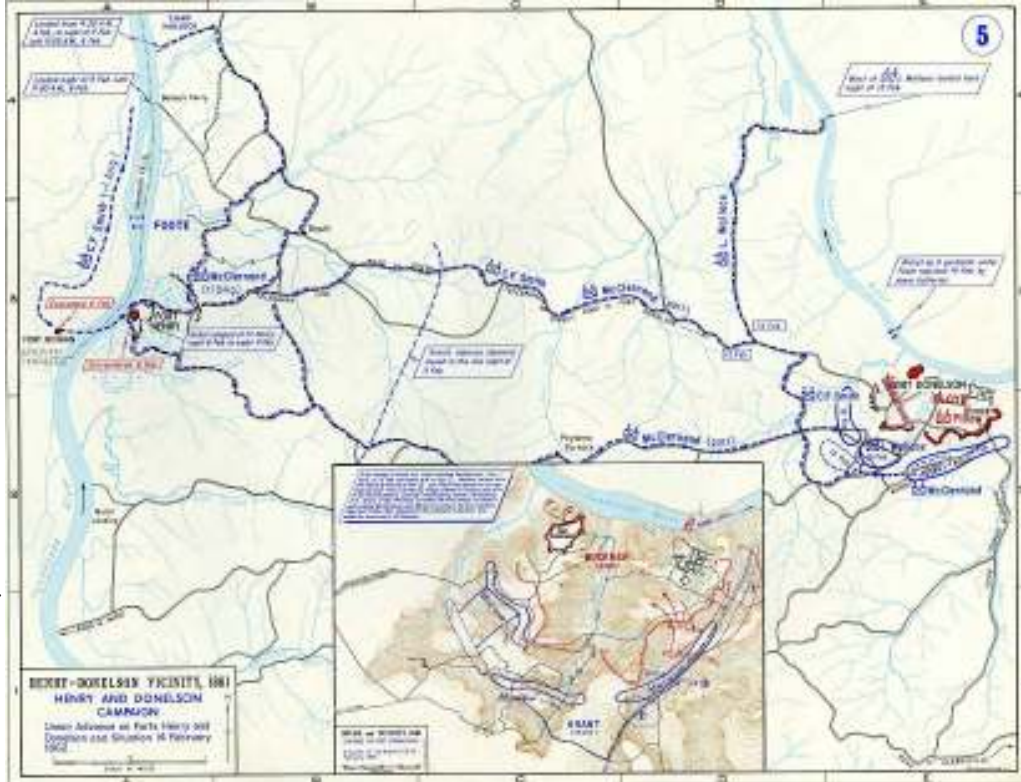
It is worth noting that, in 1916, the Daughters of the Army of the Confederacy erected a fountain in Women's Park in Helena, Montana. This is the northernmost Confederate monument in the United States.

One final note: Lincoln's man on the frontier, Sidney Edgerton, like so many Civil War personalities (Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, McPherson, to name a few), was an Ohio boy. He moved from New York to Tallmadge (near Akron) in 1844 at the age of twenty-six and taught there. He graduated from Cincinnati Law School in 1845 and was admitted to the Bar and began his practice in Akron in 1846. He was the Prosecuting Attorney in Summit County from 1852 to 1856. After his service in Idaho and Montana, he returned to Akron a wealthy man and resumed his practice of law. He died on July 19, 1900, and is interred in Tallmadge Cemetery.

John Fazio is a Cleveland lawyer and frequent contributor to the Charger.

FEBRUARY, 1862—FORTS HENRY AND DONELSON

At the beginning of the war, Tennessee faced the daunting task of defending its lengthy east-west border. The Confederacy placed more emphasis on holding and defending Bowling Green, Ky. and the Mississippi River than it did in defending the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers. The fall of the river forts in February 1862 led to the abandonment of Confederate positions at Paducah and Bowling Green. While the Union army swept southward, the



“invincible” ironclad gunboats roamed the rivers at will. Fearing Nashville would be reduced to ruins, Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston abandoned the city without a fight. The major bloodbath at Shiloh (Pittsburg Landing) would come a month later.

The first fort to fall was Fort Henry on the east bank of the Tennessee River, just south of the Kentucky border. The fort had been poorly situated, and was partially flooded when the Union gunboats approached on February 6 and opened fire at nearly point-blank range. By the time the Union army arrived at the scene, Fort Henry had been captured, along with its commander. The Confederates had built a fort on the west bank of the Tennessee River called Fort Heiman, directly across from Fort Henry, but apparently no big guns had been positioned there and the fort served little use. Men fleeing from Fort Henry, along with reinforcements, swelled the Confederate forces at nearby Fort Donelson from 3,000 to approximately 15,000 men.

On February 14, Valentine’s Day, the Union gunboat flotilla, now on the Cumberland River, approached to within 400 yards of Fort Donelson’s river batteries. Flag-Officer Andrew Foote believed that victory would come as easily as at Fort Henry. He was wrong. The Confederate gunners, firing from a lofty elevation, severely damaged many of the gunboats, which were forced to withdraw. The next day, however, a breakdown in the Confederate high command led to the failure of an attempt to break out of the encircling Union forces, which now numbered about 27,000 men. A little-known Confederate colonel, Nathan Bedford Forrest, did manage to escape and lead his men to Nashville. Generals Floyd and Pillow fled the scene, and it was left to General Simon B. Buckner (an Ohioan) to surrender Fort Donelson to General U.S. Grant, who demanded “unconditional surrender.”

Grant was promoted to a two-star general and became a hero in the North. Thousands of Confederate soldiers became prisoners of war and were transported by river to Northern POW camps. Later in the year, most were “paroled” in exchange for Union prisoners. The fall of Fort Donelson threw Nashville officials and citizens into a panic, fearing destruction by the Union ironclad gunboats. Fort Zollicoffer, located west of Nashville on the Cumberland River, was abandoned and did not contest the gunboats. Within ten days, Union troops entered the city and held it for the remainder of the war.

GENERAL OF THE MONTH — HENRY WIRZ, 1822-1865

Wirz was the Confederate officer who commanded the infamous Andersonville Prison, where many Union prisoners died, and was executed for his role there. Wirz was born in Switzerland and emigrated to the United States in 1849, taking up the practice of medicine in Louisiana. When the Civil War broke out, he enlisted as a private and saw early service as a clerk in Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia. In the Peninsular Campaign, Wirz was seriously wounded at Seven Pines in May, 1862. Promoted to Captain, he was then sent to Europe as a Confederate dispatch bearer and purchasing agent. In January, 1864, he returned and was assigned to head the newly formed military prison in Georgia that became known as Andersonville, although its formal name was Camp Sumter. A log stockade enclosing some 17 acres, later 26, Andersonville quickly grew to take in some 33,000 Federal prisoners - all enlisted men - by the summer of 1864. Although they were given the basic rations of the Confederate troops, there was such overcrowding and poor sanitation that the diet plus exposure to the elements soon led to the spread of disease. There would eventually be some 13,000 identified graves there, but it was estimated that many others died. As General Sherman drew near in September, 1864, the Confederates transferred the healthy prisoners to Charleston. Wirz was taken prisoner later and charged with committing specific crimes, even conspiracy to kill prisoners. In November, 1865, after being found guilty by a special court martial, he was executed.

Taken from The Civil War Almanac (Bison Books, 1983).

NEXT MEETING – MARCH 9, 2005

MYTHS OF SHILOH

TIM SMITH

SHILOH NATIONAL PARK HISTORIAN