

March, 2006

431st Meeting

Vol. 27 #7

Tonight's Program:

## The Trial of Henry Wirz



The trial of Wirz lasted sixty-three days. In the words of Shakespeare, the time had to be “condensed into an hourglass.” Hundreds of witnesses gave testimony, which was selectively reduced to seven. The trial had only male participants. To give women the opportunity to take part, Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, and Mrs. Ambrose Spencer were added to the list of witnesses. Their testimony, however, comes from historical sources. Defense counsel’s address to the Court at the end of the play never actually took place because Wirz’s lawyers, Otis Baker and Louis Schade, quit in protest before the trial ended. Three years later, Schade wrote an article in defense of Wirz that Baker reads in his address to the Court.

With the exception of Louis Schade’s “A Defense of Captain Henry Wirz,” which comes from *The True Story of Andersonville Prison* by James M. Page (1908), the dialog is taken from trial records and other material that the former Judge Advocate, Norton P. Chipman, put in his book, *The Tragedy of Andersonville, Trial of Captain Henry Wirz, the Prison Keeper*. Published in 1911, Chipman wrote his tome in reaction to the dedication of a Wirz monument near the prison site two years earlier.

The Wirz trial is significant because it was cited in the trials of war criminals in the twentieth century. Military personnel were now to be held accountable for following orders that resulted in crimes against humanity.

Tonight's Author:

## Dale Thomas

Dale Thomas, a retired teacher, has been a member of the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable for ten years. He is currently archivist for the Olmsted Historical Society and a member of the Lincoln New Salem Society. After serving two years in the U.S. Army, he attended college on the GI Bill and received a BS in Social Studies from Kent State University and MA in History from Case Western Reserve University. Dale also currently maintains the web site of the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable.

**Date: Wednesday,  
March 8, 2006**

**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: Chicken Italiano  
or Vegetarian Dinner**

## CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

FOUNDED 1957

*President:* **Dave Carrino** (440) 843-9088  
*Vice President:* **John Fazio** (330) 867-1535  
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Editor - THE CHARGER - Dan Zeiser

### Cleveland Civil War Roundtable Past Presidents

2005 Mel Maurer	1980 Charles Spiegle
2004 Warren McClelland	1979 William Bates
2003 Maynard Bauer	1978 Richard McCrae
2002 Bill McGrath	1977 James Chapman
2001 William Vodrey	1976 Milton Holmes
2000 Bob Boyda	1975 Thomas Gretter
1999 Dick Crews	1974 Nolan Heidelbaugh
1998 John Moore	1973 Arthur Jordan
1997 Dan Zeiser	1972 Bernard Drews
1996 John Sutula	1971 Kenneth Callahan
1995 Norton London	1970 Frank Schuhle
1994 Robert Battisti	1969 Donald Heckaman
1993 Kevin Callahan	1968 Frank Moran
1992 Bob Baucher	1967 William Schlesinger
1991 Joe Tirpak	1966 Donald Hamill
1990 Ken Callahan Jr.	1965 Lester Swift
1989 Neil Glaser	1964 Guy DiCarlo, Jr.
1988 Martin Graham	1963 Paul Guenther
1987 George Vourlojanis	1962 Edward Downer
1986 Tim Beatty	1961 Charles Clarke
1985 Brian Kowell	1960 Howard Preston
1984 Neil Evans	1959 John Cullen, Jr.
1983 William Victory	1958 George Farr, Jr.
1982 John Harkness	1957 Kenneth Grant
1981 Thomas Geschke	

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### MARCH, 2006

Hdqrs. Cvlnd. Civil War Rtbl.  
March 8, 2006

February's meeting gave us a detailed look at the life and achievements of one of the Civil War's exemplary figures: Joshua Chamberlain. Thanks to William Vodrey's superb presentation, we were treated to a thorough examination of Chamberlain, not only as a Civil War leader whose contributions had a profound effect on the war and who was present at some of its most important moments, but also as a person of impressive talents and traits. William made clear how Chamberlain's wartime accomplishments grew out of not only his strong sense of duty to the Union, but also his capacity to comprehend the significance of his actions on the course of events. As William pointed out, Chamberlain overcame serious physical injuries through sheer force of will to continue to serve his cause. William further explained that Chamberlain's sense of duty and legacy fueled his postwar career in political and academic pursuits. Chamberlain was able to build on his wartime reputation and, in fact, take advantage of it to become more than a war hero. As a result, while Chamberlain's legacy quite naturally focuses on his Civil War achievements, he remains a figure renowned as more than a soldier. Chamberlain's greatness became clear not only from the information William communicated, but also the admiration he has for Chamberlain. This made William's presentation all the more enjoyable, since it allowed us not only to learn about Chamberlain's life, but experience and appreciate his character. My thanks to William for a very impressive and heartfelt presentation.

Very respy. your obt. srvt.  
D.A. Carrino

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

September 14, 2005

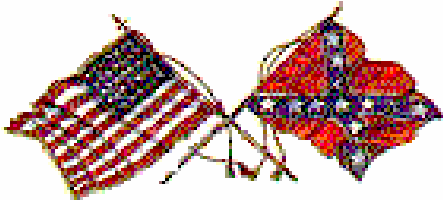
**T h e y  
H a d  
N a v i e s,  
T o o???**



**Bruce Smith**

October 12, 2005

**How the Civil War Still Lives**



**James I. Robertson Jr.**

November 9, 2005

**The Transformation of  
Abolitionism in War and  
Peace: Oberlin, Ohio as a Case  
Study**

**Carol Lasser and Gary J.  
Kornblith, Oberlin College**

December 14, 2005

**The Supply for Tomorrow  
Must Not Fail: The Civil War of  
Captain Simon J. Perkins Jr., a  
Civil War Quartermaster**

**Lennette Taylor  
Summit County Historical Society**

January 11, 20056

**The Great Debate**

*The Most Overrated Leader  
(Military or Political) of the  
Civil War*

**Moderator: William Vodrey**

February 8, 2006

**Joshua Lawrence  
Chamberlain:  
Scholar, Citizen,  
Soldier  
William F. B. Vodrey**



March 8, 2006

**The Trial of Henry  
Wirz  
A Play by  
Dale Thomas**



April 12, 2006

**A New Framework for Civil  
War Military History**

**Richard McMurry**

May 10, 2006

**Union Jacks:  
Yankee Sailors  
In the Civil  
War**



**Michael Bennett**

## JOHN AND FANNY

John Fazio, CWRT Vice President, Third in a Series

All right, I admit it. I am an incurable romantic. I love those touching, poignant scenes that reflect the best that is in us, if not always the strongest. I am talking about Spencer Tracy grabbing John Carradine's shirt, under his neck, telling him that he will kill him if he lays a finger on the boy, Freddie Bartholomew (*Captains Courageous*), or Rod Steiger putting a gun into brother Marlon Brando's ribs in the back seat of a car, pleading with him to "take that job," the one that will save his life, followed by Brando's plaintive lament that he could have been a contender (*On the Waterfront*), or Charles Boyer, Cary Grant and Warren Beatty realizing, at the last split second before walking out on their true loves forever (Irene Dunne, Deborah Kerr and Annette Bening, respectively), that the latter missed their appointment atop the Empire State Building because of an automobile accident (*An Affair to Remember*, a love story so gripping that it has been filmed three times), and countless others that jerk our tears and put lumps in our throats.

Well, the Civil War is filled with such scenes, not surprisingly, given the human drama that comprises this American Iliad. It is filled, too, with human interest stories of which such scenes are a part. Such a story is the story of John B. (for Brown) Gordon and his wife, Fanny Rebecca Haralson. Theirs was a long and happy marriage, a rarity even in those days, though it was not divorce and dissolution then that brought so many unions to a close, but death, which was often sudden.

They were married on September 18, 1854, at Myrtle Hill, the Haralson's ancestral home near La Grange, Georgia. The marriage lasted until John's death on January 9, 1904 -- almost 50 years. The wedding was a small, private affair, in her father's bedroom in deference to his health, which shortly before had taken a bad turn. In fact, one week later, General Hugh Anderson Haralson died. He had represented Georgia in Congress for many years and was Chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs during the Mexican War. Shortly after the wedding, John and Fanny moved to Atlanta.

John was a chivalrous and high-minded man, a cavalier in a society that prized cavaliers. He was brave to a fault, courageous and strong in his convictions, fair-minded, and profoundly respectful of his adversaries. Complementing these qualities were a keen intellect and a sensitive spirit, which were reflected in a poem he wrote for Fanny on the occasion of their thirty-seventh wedding anniversary (her fifty-fourth birthday).

The day of days I now remember,  
The sweetest far was in September,

When woods and fields and star-light skies,  
And mellow suns and Autumn's sighs,

Made earth so fair and life so sweet,  
As Heaven bowed this world to greet,  
And threw its sheen o'er nature's face,  
And clasped all things in Love's embrace.

'Twas natal day to fair young bride,  
'Twas natal day to new-borne pride,  
In him whose life and hope and care,  
This fair young bride henceforth must share.

So young she was, so winsome, coy,  
So lithe her form, so pure her joy,  
So rare her grace, so e'er discreet,  
So trusting, true, so fair and sweet,

That happy man ne'er won for wife,  
To lift his aims and brighten life,  
More helpful hand or mind, I ween  
Than this sweet girl of seventeen.

Though birthdays come and years pass by,  
Though clouds may dim September's sky,  
Though threads of gray may streak thy hair,  
And roses fade from cheeks so fair,

Still Beauty's seal is on thy brow,  
No brighter, nobler, then as now,  
My love's still warm as 'twas when you  
Were seventeen, I twenty-two.



Francis Brown Gordon



Fanny Rebecca Haralson

There probably were few North or South who could pen verse as good as that, and probably few who could inspire it. And that tells us a lot about our subjects.

John was born on February 6, 1832, in Upson City, Georgia, the son of a minister and plantation owner. He attended Georgia State University, but, despite being an excellent student, did not graduate, opting instead to study law. In those days an undergraduate degree was not always a prerequisite to the study of law. In any case, he was admitted to the Bar in 1854, began a practice with Basil H. Overby and Logan E. Bleckly, and through them met and married the love of his life, who was the younger sister of the wives of both partners. Like so many other freshmen lawyers, he threw in the towel early. In 1855, he tried his hand at journalism in Milledgeville, then the state capital, but this career, too, came to an abrupt end. In 1856, he and his father started a coal mining business (the Castle Rock Coal Company) near the common borders of Alabama, Georgia and Tennessee, which is to say the scene of much

of the fighting in the western theater of the war that was soon to come. Indeed, the Battle of Chickamauga was fought in part on the Gordons' property.

John was a spellbinding orator, a talent he used to good effect in inspiring his men in battle. He was also ramrod erect in his saddle and was said to make a most striking appearance on his coal-black stallion. A born leader, he rose in rank during the war, from captain to corps commander, a feat unmatched in the Army of Northern Virginia, and this despite beginning the war with absolutely no military education or experience. He was adored by his men, who knew him to be fearless without being reckless. Lee's biographer, Douglas Southall Freeman, said that John was "Lee's principal confidant -- as far as any man ever enjoyed that status." Gordon's biographer, Ralph Lowell Eckert, described him as "six feet tall, slight of build, and straight as a ramrod. Gordon looked every inch a soldier." President Theodore Roosevelt would later say that "A more gallant, generous and fearless gentlemen and soldier has not been seen by our country." Robert E. Lee, in a letter to Jefferson Davis, said that John was characterized "by splendid audacity."

It must be said, too, however, that John was a racist, believing very strongly in slavery and just as strongly in secession. Without minimizing these deficiencies, we should not judge him too harshly because of them. As for the first deficiency, he was a product of his time and of his region. What should we expect from the son of a plantation owner in the antebellum South? that the plantation owner was also a minister meant nothing at that time and place. It is said that the Devil can quote Scripture. Clergymen of all faiths found justification in Scripture for the odious institution, which proves only that where economics are concerned, the human mind is infinitely warpable. As for the second deficiency, a Georgian opposed to secession in 1861 would have felt like a leper in a nudist colony. In any case, John's pluses clearly outweighed these minuses and probably some others we know naught. There, I think, we should leave the matter.

That is quite enough, I think, to tell us what John B. Gordon was made of. How then shall we regard the woman who loved him and chose to make her life with him? And shall we be surprised when we learn that throughout his many campaigns in the war she followed him whenever and wherever she could so that, if and when he needed her (and he would!), she would be there? That meant covering a lot of territory, because John was soon all over the landscape with Lee and, later, Early. Keeping up with him would have been an arduous task for anyone, but especially for a woman, unless she was an extraordinary woman, which, clearly, she was. Even her lifespan was extraordinary. Fanny was born in La Grange on September 18, 1837 and lived almost into our own time, dying on April 28, 1931 at the age of

ninety-three -- an almost unheard of longevity in those days.

John fought in all the major battles, and many of the minor ones, in the eastern theater, including First Bull Run, the Seven Days Battles on the Peninsula (Fair Oaks (Seven Pines) and Malvern Hill), Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, Petersburg, and in the Valley with Early, at Monacacy, Third Winchester, Fisher's Hill, and Cedar Creek. Despite many and serious wounds, he was with Lee at the end.

Fanny followed him. She left their children with relatives to free her for what in her judgment was a higher duty. Because of Southern custom, she could not be a battlefield nurse, but she could and did stay in the camps while the battles in which John fought were raging nearby. During the Battle of Fair Oaks, on the Peninsula, she stayed at the home of an uncle in Richmond. When news was brought to her, at the end of the day, that John had survived the carnage, the sudden release of pent up tension caused her to collapse.

At Antietam, he took five minie balls in his leg, arm, and face, and, incredibly, survived. How? By the love and devotion of a very energetic and gutsy woman. The facial wound caused his face to blacken and swell and his eyes to narrow, so much so that he could barely see. None of this deterred her. His jaw had been wired shut, which made feeding an extremely difficult proposition, but she knelt at his side and managed to get a little liquid nourishment past his clenched teeth. To make matters much worse, a usually fatal infection developed in his arm. The doctors told her that daily application of iodine to the wound might cure it. She did it, in his words, "three or four hundred times a day" – an exaggeration, of course, but the point is made. It worked. The infection receded and, after many months of patience and care, John was pieced together and ready to lead men into battle again.

After recovering from his Antietam wounds, he told how a ball through his hat saved his life, because by bleeding profusely from his head wound he would have drowned in his own blood if it had not drained through the hole made by the ball. For his service at Antietam, John was named brigadier general on November 1, 1862, a promotion confirmed on May 11, 1863, and made retroactive to May 7, 1862, after Chancellorsville. At Chancellorsville (May 5 and 6, 1863), he assumed temporary command of the Georgia Brigade, part of the 31<sup>st</sup> Georgia Infantry Regiment, and fought with distinction. Following the battle, his command was made permanent. He sustained no injury during this battle, and that was fortunate, because Fanny was not, in this instance, permitted to accompany him. Prior to Gettysburg, John's Georgians occupied Wrightsville, Pennsylvania, on the Susquehanna River, the most easterly point reached by organized troops of the Army of Northern Virginia.

**Continued next month**

## **The Trial of Henry Wirz**

### **Rehearsal**

**The cast will rehearse  
on Sunday, March 5 at  
1PM in the Jazzercise  
Center, 27070 Detroit  
Road off Interstate 90 in  
Westlake.**

Fairfield Heritage Association , Lancaster, Ohio

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An opportunity to meet Charles Flood, Author of  
*Grant and Sherman, The Friendship That Won the Civil War*

Charles Flood will attend a reception and book signing on Friday evening, May 5, 2006, at the Sherman House, 137 East Main Street, Lancaster, Ohio 43130 (740-654-9923) from 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. On Saturday afternoon, May 6, Mr. Flood will again be at the Sherman House to sign books. **In the evening on Saturday, May 6, 2006 there will be a dinner at Shaw's Restaurant and Inn at 6:00 p.m.** Mr. Flood will be in attendance. During the weekend, there will also be a House Tour.

Reservations are required for the Friday book signing and reception and Saturday dinner. Reservations are recommended, but not required for the House Tour. Cost for the book signing and reception are \$8.00 per person. Cost for the dinner is \$30.00 per person. Advance tickets for the House Tour are \$10.00, tickets at the door are \$12.00. Contact the Fairfield Heritage Association for more details.

**Fairfield Heritage Association, 105 East Wheeling Street,  
Lancaster, Ohio 43130, (Phone: 740-654-9923)**

**Next Month**  
**A New Framework for Civil War Military History**  
**Richard McMurry**