

October, 2005

426th Meeting

Vol. 27 #2

Tonight's

Program: **How the Civil War Still Lives**

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” This quote, which exists in various forms and is attributed to George Santayana, is a well-known admonition about the importance of studying history because of its influence on the present. A more deterministic quote in this vein is one that, in the typical uncertainty surrounding the pronouncements of this author, may or may not have been said by Mark Twain: “History does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme.” The implication of this quote is that events of the past have a way of recurring at least in some form. Those who disparage a study of history often remark that such an interest is pointless, because nothing can change it. They deride those who enjoy discussing and analyzing past events by asserting that no amount of talking about what-ifs can change what happened and, since history is already known, rehashing it is an exercise in redundancy. (Ironically, these same individuals enjoy repeated viewings of movies whose outcome is known and dialogue is firmly committed to memory.) For those of us in the Roundtable, no amount of disparagement can dampen our enthusiasm for the Civil War. Whether our interest in it is of some importance, it provides us with a great deal of enjoyment. However, those whose profession is history make clear the importance of this field, and one such person is our speaker for October, Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr. In his presentation, Dr. Robertson will extend the wisdom contained in the above admonitions by informing us how history is not only the past, but is also the present. Dr. Robertson will enlighten us about “How the Civil War Still Lives.”

Dr. James I. Robertson Jr.

Dr. James I. Robertson Jr. is the Alumni Distinguished Professor of History at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The recipient of every major award in the field of Civil War history, he has authored many award-winning books including a biography of Stonewall Jackson. A Civil War era class taught by Dr. Robertson is the largest of its kind in the country with an enrollment of 250 students. Dr. Robertson's has appeared on venues such as The History Channel and the Arts & Entertainment Network.

Date: **Wednesday,
October 12, 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: **Roast Turkey
or Vegetarian Dinner**

CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

FOUNDED 1957

President: **Dave Carrino** (440) 843-9088
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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

OCTOBER, 2005

Hdqrs. Cvlnd. Civil War Rtbl.
October 12, 2005

With the help of Bruce Smith, Executive Director of the National Civil War Naval Museum, the champagne bottle was smashed against the hull of the 2005-2006 session and the session was officially launched. Bruce delivered a thorough and engrossing presentation on naval warfare in the Civil War. He concluded his presentation with some impressive photographs showing the exciting restoration work recently completed at the museum, work that involves flags from some of the most prominent ships in the Confederate navy. It was clear from Bruce's knowledge and enthusiasm that he is passionate about the topic of Civil War navies, and it was clear from the large number of questions that he stimulated great interest among us.

The other major Roundtable event in September was the annual field trip. The 2005 field trip saw 12 Roundtable members trek to Virginia for tours of the Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville battlefields. Our guide, Greg Mertz, Supervisory Historian of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, did a superb job of not only explaining the battles in detail, but bringing the events in the battles to life. Standing by the stone wall at the foot of Marye's Heights and the place of the cracker box meeting of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson were memorable parts of the tours. Particularly memorable, especially given the gloomy chill of the overcast afternoon, was to stand at the spot where Jackson rode back to his lines and was mistakenly shot by his own troops. With the September meeting and the field trip, the 2005-2006 session is now full steam ahead.

Very respy. your obt. srvt.

D.A. Carrino

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

September 14, 2005

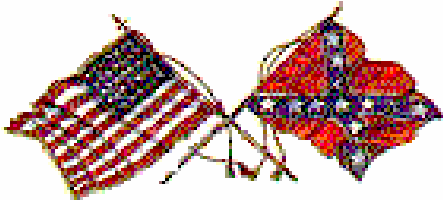
**T h e y
H a d
N a v i e s,
T o o ???**



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

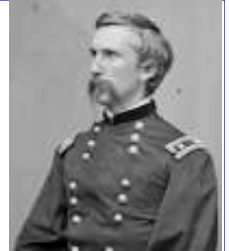
The Great Debate

*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

Constitution Causes Civil War

Of course, you say, the Constitution caused the Civil War. By recognizing and institutionalizing slavery, the war was inevitable. But this is not the only reason that the Constitution caused the Civil War. There was another, perhaps more important, reason that the founding fathers caused our particular sectional strife. This reason is the electoral college.

The presidency is key to analyzing the impact of the Constitution on the war. The founding fathers envisioned voters electing the best candidates as president and vice president. A quick look at the first few elections reveals their intent. The first administration had George Washington as President and John Adams as Vice President. When Adams was elected President, Thomas Jefferson served as Vice President, even though he was from the rival party. The framers would indeed be shocked to see how we elect our presidents today.

The presidency changed with Andrew Jackson. He portrayed himself as the people's representative, appealing directly to them for support. The president became the symbolic center of the federal government, as it is still seen today. As a result, the presidency became the focus of partisanship and political parties placed much emphasis on controlling the office. Thus, the method of choosing a president gained great importance. It is here that the framers choice of the electoral college becomes vital.

Concerned about the effect of popular pressure upon the executive, the founding fathers chose to insulate the president from the people. Unfortunately, this played a direct role in the coming of the Civil War. In the first handful of presidential elections, votes were cast not for the presidential candidates, but for slates of party electors pledged to a candidate. In the nineteenth century, however, parties abandoned choosing presidential electors by congressional district and replaced it with granting all of a state's electoral votes to the candidate who won the popular vote. This system permitted bloc voting by state.

Two consequences resulted from bloc voting. First was to amplify the importance of the most populous states, which, of course, controlled the most electoral votes. The second was greater in impact and caused the Civil War. It permitted sectional parties. With support confined to the North, the Republican party could not have won a presidential contest based on the popular vote. In 1860, Abraham Lincoln won with less than forty percent of the vote. However, since his support was concentrated in the North, with its majority of electoral votes, he won. As the recipient of all the electoral votes of each state he won, Lincoln swept ninety-eight percent of the North's electoral votes while winning only fifty-four percent of the vote in these states. The Republican party could only win under an approach where the winner took all of a state's electoral votes.

The rise of the sectional Republican party led to the war. When national politics were controlled by two truly national parties, it was nearly impossible for the political gridlock that led to the war to occur. With a constituency drawn from both North and South, a party was forced into compromise and sectional accord. Even when the slavery issue rose to the fore, the two party system was able to deflect its impact. The Missouri Compromise, the Compromise of

1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act are examples of the system at work.

For the system to work properly, though, both parties must be accepted as legitimate. A truly sectional party, however, finds it difficult to gain such legitimacy. Since its support is limited to a certain geographic area or particular issue, the opposition finds it difficult to treat it as a legitimate contender. The Free Soil and Know Nothing parties are proof of this. In 1860, Southerners refused to give the Republican party this standing. From their perspective, Lincoln's election was more than one party assuming power from another, a temporary setback that could be overturned in the next election. As a party whose sole purpose was the elimination of slavery, in the South's eyes, the Republican success was a turning point. Slavery would be ended, the Southern way of life destroyed. Returning a Democrat to power in 1864 could not put back into place that which had been destroyed. This was different than, say, repealing a tariff that had been put in place. The nation could not be returned to the status quo that stood prior to 1860. Faced with such a situation, the choice for Southerners was clear. If the South remained in the Union, it faced the end of its way of life. To save the society they had built, Southerners could not remain in the Union. Secession seemed the only way out.

It is no great leap to claim that the creation of the Republican party, a truly sectional party in its first years, was the crucial link in the chain of events leading to the Civil War. The success of the party was a direct outcome of the electoral college. Since this system allowed a candidate who won a state to receive all of its electoral votes, it permitted the scenario that resulted in Lincoln's victory. The founding fathers were truly visionaries. They created a system that has not only survived, but adapted well for over two hundred years. They were not perfect, however. They could not foresee every possibility or consequence of their creation. Nor should they be expected to. The conclusion is clear, though, the Constitution caused the Civil War.

Wednesday, October 12, 1864

Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Roger Brooke Taney died in Washington at age 89. Taney, born on a plantation in Maryland in 1777, was graduated from Dickinson College in 1795 and became a member of the bar in 1799. Politically active in Maryland, he took a special interest in the rights of blacks, either slave or free. He served as Andrew Jackson's Attorney General from 1831 to 1833, and as Secretary of the Treasury from 1833 to 1834. He was nominated for the Supreme Court in 1835 and confirmed as Chief Justice on March 15, 1836.

He is known for the Merryman case, where he authored the opinion holding that only Congress had the power to suspend *habeus corpus*. (Lincoln simply ignored Taney's order.) His most famous written opinion was the Dred Scott case.

The Battle of Fredericksburg

Embarrassed by General McClellan's repeated defeats and apparent lack of commitment in prosecuting the war, Lincoln replaced him on November 7 with General Ambrose Burnside. Burnside launched a winter campaign against the Confederate capital, Richmond, by way of Fredericksburg, a strategically important town on the Rappahannock River. The Federal Army of the Potomac, 115,000-strong, raced to Fredericksburg, arriving on November 17. There were only a few thousand Confederates on hand to challenge them, yet the Federal advance ground to a halt on the eastern bank of the Rappahannock, opposite the city. Burnside's campaign was delayed for over a week when material he had ordered for pontoon bridges failed to arrive. Disappointed by the delay, Burnside marked time for a further two weeks. Meanwhile, Lee took advantage of the stalled Federal drive to concentrate and entrench his Army of Northern Virginia, some 78,000-strong, on the high ground behind Fredericksburg.

With the arrival of the pontoons, Burnside crossed the river on December 11, despite fierce fire from Confederate snipers concealed in buildings along the city's river front. When the Confederates withdrew, Federal soldiers looted the town, from which the inhabitants had been evacuated. By December 13, Burnside was prepared to launch a two-pronged attack to drive Lee's forces from an imposing set of hills just outside Fredericksburg.

The main assault struck south of the city. Misunderstandings and bungled leadership on the part of the commander of the Federal left, Major General William B. Franklin, limited the attacking force to two small divisions - Major General George G. Meade to lead; Major General John Gibbon in support. Meade's troops broke through an unguarded gap in the Confederate lines, but Jackson's men expelled the unsupported Federals, inflicting heavy losses. Burnside launched his second attack from Fredericksburg against the Confederate left on Marye's Heights. Wave after wave of Federal attackers were mown down by Confederate troops firing from an unassailable position in a sunken road protected by a stone wall. Over the course of the afternoon, no fewer than fourteen successive Federal brigades charged the wall of Confederate fire. Not a single Federal soldier reached Longstreet's line.

On December 15, Burnside ordered his beaten army back across the Rappahannock. The Union had lost 13,000 soldiers in a battle in which the dreadful carnage was matched only by its futility. Federal morale plummeted, and Burnside was swiftly relieved of his command. By contrast, the morale of the Confederacy reached a peak. Their casualties had been considerably lighter than the Union's, totaling only 5,000. Lee's substantial victory at Fredericksburg, won with relative ease, increased the already buoyant confidence of the Army of Northern Virginia, which led subsequently to the invasion of the North the following summer.

Source: "The Atlas of the Civil War" by James M. McPherson

The Battle of Chancellorsville

As the Federal army converged on Chancellorsville, General Hooker expected Lee to retreat from his forces, which totaled nearly 115,000. Although heavily outnumbered with just under 60,000 troops - Lee had no intention of retreating. The Confederate commander divided his army: one part remained to guard Fredericksburg, while the other raced west to meet Hooker's advance. When the van of Hooker's column clashed with the Confederates' on May 1, Hooker pulled his troops back to Chancellorsville, a lone tavern at a crossroads in a dense wood known locally as The Wilderness. Here Hooker took up a defensive line, hoping Lee's need to carry out an uncoordinated attack through the dense undergrowth would leave the Confederate forces disorganized and vulnerable.

To retain the initiative, Lee risked dividing his forces still further, 'retaining two divisions to focus Hooker's attention, while Stonewall Jackson marched the bulk of the Confederate army west across the front of the Federal line to a position opposite its exposed right flank. Jackson executed this daring and dangerous maneuver throughout the morning and afternoon of May 2. Striking two hours before dusk, Jackson's men routed the astonished Federals in their camps. In the gathering darkness, amid the brambles of the Wilderness, the Confederate line became confused and halted at 9 p.m. to regroup. Riding in front of the lines to reconnoiter, Stonewall Jackson was accidentally shot and seriously wounded by his own men. Later that night, his left arm was amputated just below the shoulder.

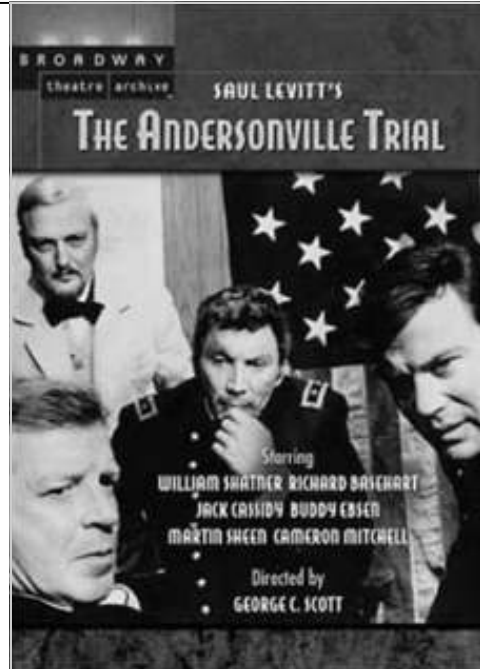
On May 3, Jackson's successor, General J.E.B. Stuart, initiated the bloodiest day of the battle when attempting to reunite his troops with Lee's. Despite an obstinate defense by the Federals, Hooker ordered them to withdraw north of the Chancellor House. The Confederates were converging on Chancellorsville to finish Hooker when a message came from Jubal Early that Federal troops had broken through at Fredericksburg. At Salem Church, Lee threw a cordon around these Federals, forcing them to retreat across the Rappahannock. Disappointed, Lee returned to Chancellorsville, only to find that Hooker had also retreated across the river.

Chancellorsville is considered Lee's greatest victory, although the Confederate commander's daring and skill met little resistance from the inept generalship of Joseph Hooker. Using cunning, and dividing their forces repeatedly, the massively outnumbered Confederates drove the Federal army from the battlefield. The cost had been frightful. The Confederates suffered 14,000 casualties, while inflicting 17,000. Perhaps the most damaging loss to the Confederacy was the death of Lee's "right arm," Stonewall Jackson, who died of pneumonia on May 10 while recuperating from his wounds.

Source: "The Atlas of the Civil War" by James M. McPherson

CALL FOR THESPIANS

The meeting on March 8, 2006 will be a presentation of a play written by Roundtable member Dale Thomas. The play is a dramatization of the trial of Henry Wirz, the Commandant of Andersonville Prison, and the script is based on the actual trial. At the conclusion of the presentation, everyone in attendance at the March meeting will vote on the verdict. The cast of the play will consist of Roundtable members, who are interested in participating. If you are so interested, please contact Dale Thomas (e-mail: a-bell@adelphia.net; home phone: 440-779-6454). Regrettably, Captain Kirk will be unable to participate as he is currently occupied playing an attorney in another project.



NEXT MONTH

THE TRANSFORMATION OF ABOLITIONISM IN WAR AND PEACE:

OBERLIN, OHIO AS A CASE STUDY

CAROL LASSER AND GARY J. KORNBLITH