

THE CHARGER

May 2009

460th Meeting

Vol. 30 #9

Tonight's Program:

The Fighting McCooks



During the Civil War, the legendary "Fighting McCooks" were familiar to most Americans. Time and the tempestuous twentieth century swept Ohio's famous fighting family into a twilight of obscurity. Now the true story of this remarkable Scotch-Irish family is finally seeing the bright light of day. And what a story it is!

In 1790 when George McCook emigrated from Northern Ireland and settled in the Ohio Valley, little did he know that, when Civil War erupted in 1861, his three sons and fourteen grandsons would become famous as "The Fighting McCooks."

Heroic and bold, they fought on forty-six battlefields. No major battle took place in the western theater of war that did not include at least one of the seventeen Fighting McCooks. They were on the front lines from the first shots of the war to the last.

In addition to being a war story, this is a fascinating family story of life in early America. Nearly all the McCook men were college educated. They were doctors, lawyers, businessmen, politicians, and judges. Two were West Point and Naval Academy graduates. One was studying for the ministry, another was a riverboat pilot, and several were college students. Yet personal ambitions were trumped by patriotism as, one by one, each of the seventeen Fighting McCooks answered the call of their young country and volunteered to save the Union.

Tonight's Speaker:

Barbara Whalen

Barbara Whalen was born in Detroit, Michigan, and graduated from Marymount College, Tarrytown, New York. She is a former newspaper columnist, radio and television writer, and advertising executive.

She wrote *The Fighting McCooks* with her husband, Charles Whalen, with whom she has co-authored *The Longest Debate: A Legislative History of the 1964 Civil Rights Act*.

Ms. Whalen has six children and six grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Bethesda, Maryland.

**Date: Wednesday,
May 13, 2009**

**Place: Judson Manor NEW!
1890 E. 107th Street
Cleveland, Ohio**

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

**Reservations: Please Call NEW!
Dan Zeiser (440) 449-9311
Or email ccwrt1956@yahoo.com
By 8 pm Tuesday before meeting**

**Meal choice: Includes entree,
vegetable, potato or rice, salad,
and dessert**

**CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE
2008/2009 SCHEDULE**

September 10, 2008

**Varina Davis:
First Lady of the
Confederacy**

Dr. Joan Cashin



October 8, 2008



**The Supreme Court
During the
Civil War**

Chris Fortunato

November 12, 2008

**Blood, Tears, and Glory:
How Ohioans Won the
Civil War**

Dr. James Bissland

December 10, 2008

**Restoring
the
USS
Monitor**



Dr. Sean Brossia

January 14, 2009

**The Dick Crews Annual
Debate**

*The Hitherto Unknown Meeting
Of Abraham Lincoln and
Jefferson Davis at Hampton Roads in January, 1865
Lincoln will be portrayed by Mel Maurer
Jefferson Davis will be portrayed by John C. Fazio*

Moderator: William F. B. Vodrey

February 11, 2009

**The Great
Emancipator
As Lawyer
Dr. Paul Finkelman**



March 11, 2009

**Meet Me at the Fair: The Northern
Ohio Sanitary Fair of the Cleveland
Chapter of the United States Sani-
tary Commission
Tim Daley**

April 8, 2009

**The Battle of Olustee:
The 54th Massachusetts Regiment
After Battery Wagner**

Dr. Michael J. Dory

May 13, 2009

The Fighting McCooks



**Barbara
Whalen**

The Fighting McCooks

Scenes from *The Fighting McCooks*

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It was the winter of 1860-61 in the Ohio Valley. On a wind-swept bank of the Ohio River, the western border between free and slave states, a bellicose doctor named John McCook stood beside a little brass cannon.

Soon a steamboat hove into view on the broad bosom of the winding river. Downbound, it was rumored to be carrying munitions from the Pittsburgh arsenal to the arming South. When the boat came into range, Dr. McCook fired his cannon furiously, and the startled deckhands dove for cover.

Folklore in the Ohio Valley says it was these artillery salvos, and not those fired a few months later at Fort Sumter, that were the opening shots of the Civil War.



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Dusk was descending on Washington City as Daniel McCook shouldered his musket in the magnificent East Room of the White House. It was April 18, 1861. The Civil War was six days old.

In the East Room it was a seriocomic scene of swashbuckling adventure as Daniel McCook and sixty assorted Westerners, wearing stovepipe hats and wielding guns with fixed bayonets, marched spiritedly on the thick velvet carpet. They were drilling to the shrill orders of a notorious Kansas gunslinger, clad in a torn shirt and rusty coat, who strutted the ballroom waving a huge sword under the glittering gaslight from three enormous chandeliers. These were the so-called Frontier Guards.

Earlier that afternoon the men had been recruited in the lobby of Willard's Hotel by the gunslinger who led them up Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House, where he announced that they had come to save President Lincoln from a lynching. This was in response to rumors that an army of fifteen thousand Southerners, flushed with victory after the capture of Fort Sumter, was marching toward the panic-stricken capital to drag Lincoln from his bed and hang him from the nearest tree.

"Is this the 'irrepressible conflict' of which we have heard so much?" Daniel McCook mused dryly.

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On June 26 Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, with a million readers weekly, began printing a terse demand and repeating it day after day:

Forward to Richmond. The Rebel Congress must not be allowed to meet there on the 20th of July. By that date the place must be held by the national army.

Bowing to pressure, Lincoln ordered General McDowell to attack Manassas and then continue "On to Richmond."

Overjoyed to be on the march, the Northern volunteers were as eager as if going on a picnic. Cocky and self-confident, they strode with a swaggering gait, bragging of their prowess and itching for a fight.

Private Charles McCook, Company I, Second Ohio, Second Brigade, First Division, trudged the dusty road in his Ohio militia uniform of black pilot cloth, red flannel blouse, gray doeskin pantaloons, wool knit stockings, and heavy brogan shoes. Strapped to his stalwart frame was his Springfield rifle, cartridge belt and box, cap box, bayonet, scabbard, knapsack, canteen, and haversack filled with three days' rations. He was in what the army called "light marching order."

It was a spectacular sight as the Union Army surged southward on July 16 under silken banners. Most of the soldiers were members of state militias and their uniforms were as diverse and colorful as the Northern states from which they came.

Some New Englanders sported Revolutionary War tricorne hats. Others wore gray forage caps with red pompons. Pennsylvania boys pinned deer tails on their hats. Massachusetts men were in blue. Regiments from New Hampshire wore gray. Vermont mountaineers marched in green.

New Yorkers were the most flamboyant. Their Fire Zouaves were garbed in costumes similar to those worn by French troops in North Africa, baggy red breeches, short blue coats, yellow cummerbunds, and red fezzes with yellow tassels. They were armed with rifles and huge bowie knives. The Fourteenth Brooklyn was resplendent in show-white gaiters and bright red breeches, modeled on the French Chasseurs. Colonel Blenker of the Eighth New York sported a magnificent red-lined cape. The glorious New York Garibaldi Guards, patterned on Italian bersagliere sharpshooters, wore red blouses and magnificent black hats with sweeping green feathers.

Fanciful and picturesque, much of the Union Army resembled a traveling theatrical troupe.

Behind them came the baggage of war. There were miles of artillery caissons, ammunition carts, ambulances, and white-topped supply wagons driven by wagoners thrashing their six-mule teams and shouting colorful oaths. In their wake plodded a herd of 150 beef cattle to be slaughtered for the victory dinner.

Off in the dusty distance, racing to catch up, careened a carriage driven by the commanding figure of Daniel McCook. With him were four members of the Congress, a large hamper of food, and his loaded Colt revolving rifle.

The Democrat congressmen, all good friends of McCook, were John McClernand, John Logan, and John Richardson of Illinois, and John Noell of Missouri. They planned to fight as civilian volunteers beside their constituents.

Sixty-two-year-old Daniel McCook planned to fight beside his young son Charlie.

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Instead of a quick Union victory, the battle of Bull Run raged savagely on, seesawing back and forth all day on July 21 under a broiling sun. Finally, however, a hard-won Union victory



CHARLES MORRIS MCCOOK.



Major Daniel McCook Sr.

seemed certain about 4:00 p.m. to Daniel McCook. Regimental bands were playing triumphant tunes. Civilians were looking around for unexploded shells to take home as trophies, and reporters were debating whether to go “On to Richmond” with McDowell’s army.

No one realized that the tide was about to turn.

Just then a sentry up in a tall pine tree shouted down that he could see fresh enemy troops running onto the battlefield. They were the last of twelve thousand Confederate reinforcements that had arrived by train from the Shenandoah Valley. Charging across the fields, the Southerners were screaming like nothing the Northerners had ever heard before.

It was like a screech of excruciating pain or a wild animal’s triumphant cry at the kill. It was the Rebel yell.

Union soldiers looked for their own reinforcements and found none. Having been marching and fighting for fourteen hours under the broiling sun, they felt betrayed and quite the battlefield in disgust. At first it was only a trickle. Then it was a stream. Then it was a torrent. Nothing could stop the Union deluge, not even General McDowell himself, galloping the battlefield on horseback and shouting at his men to turn around.

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There was no panic in the Union retreat until a shell fired by pursuing Confederates hit a small bridge, blocking the road. People shouted that the Black Horse Cavalry was coming to take them all prisoners, and a wild stampede began.

Artillery wagons fought for space with private carriages. Galloping six-horse teams crashed into each other. Ambulance drivers, hired for the battle, turned their wagons around empty and abandoned hundreds of wounded men. Teamsters dumped their ammunition over the side in order to flee faster. Baggage trains tossed trunks aside. Soldiers cut horses loose and mounted two to a steed. A U.S. senator flung himself on an army mule. The herd of beef cattle, intended for the victory dinner, turned tail and fled.

Daniel McCook, driving fast over rough roads, found that this gave his badly wounded son Charlie great pain. The boy said that he could feel the points of his back-bone cutting his entrails and asked to be laid down by the side of the road.

“I can die one place as well as another.” Charlie said.

But Daniel, anxious to get him to a doctor, kept going. At Fairfax Court House almost all the inns, taverns, and houses had been turned into hospitals. Charlie was carried into one. An army surgeon, after removing the bullet, said that it had severed the rectum, cut off the bladder, and torn up the intestines. The wound was fatal. After the anguished father told his son, he made him some tea and bathed his wound.

By midnight the retreating Union Army had passed through Fairfax Court House on its way back to Washington. The doctors and nurses also had gone. Daniel McCook was left alone with a house full of wounded soldiers and his dying son. As Charlie neared death, he asked his father to give a message to his mother.

“Tell her that I am not afraid of death, that I am glad to die for my country,” he murmured.

Then Charlie quoted a Latin verse from Horace that he had learned at Kenyon College.

“*Dulce et decorum est pro patria more.*” (It is sweet and glorious to die for one’s country.)

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In the aftermath of the Union defeat at Bull Run, Congress authorized the enlistment of 1 million men, and the North girded itself for war. The nation, in its struggle for survival, was

divided into two main theatres of war. The east lay between the Appalachian Mountains and the sea. The west lay between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River.

Seventeen “ Fighting McCooks” volunteered to save the Union, fighting mainly in the western theatre. There were three major generals, three brigadier generals, one naval lieutenant, four surgeons, two colonels, one major, one lieutenant, one private and one chaplain.

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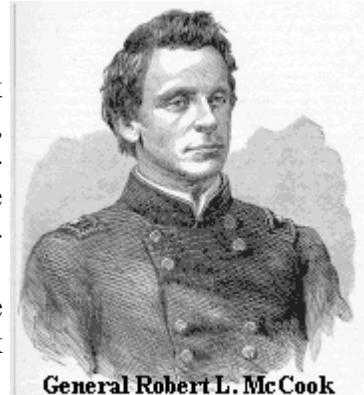
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“Charge, my bully Dutchmen!” shouted Colonel Robert McCook to the men of his all-German Ninth Ohio Regiment from Cincinnati, as he stood tall in the saddle and lifted his sword high.

It was the bitterly cold morning of January 19, 1862.

Colonel McCook led his men in a furious bayonet attack against the Confederates in a fallow cornfield near Mill Springs, Kentucky. A thousand Germans swept around the corner of a stable wielding their gleaming sabers and screaming their savage Teutonic “Hurrah” battle cries and hurling themselves like demons on the startled Rebels who scattered like chaff in the wind.

It was the first successful bayonet charge of the war. It was the first significant Union victory in the west. And Colonel McCook was promoted to Brigadier General.



General Robert L. McCook

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Seventeen McCooks fought on forty-six battlefields in eleven states and one fought the war at sea. Four gave their lives to save the Union.

“A record of which the nation may well feel proud.”

Thirty-ninth Congress of the United States, April 13, 1866.

Note: You can purchase an autographed and inscribed copy of *The Fighting McCooks* on our website: www.thefightingmccooks.com. The book is also available through bookstores and on Amazon.com.



The winner of the quiz question submitted by Dick Crews for last month was Peter Holman. The correct answer: The monument is located at the entrance to the South Carolina Capital in Columbia, South Carolina. The statue is a tribute to the men of South Carolina who served in the Civil War. Peter Holman is unable to accept the books, so he has donated them to the quiz. They are: Shelby Foote's, *The Courses in their stars*, *The Gettysburg Campaign* and *God and General Longstreet*.

Territory trod and sailed by the Fighting McCooks in their quest to save the Union.

