

THE CHARGER



CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

APRIL, 2015

VOL. 36, #9

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The President's Message for April 2015



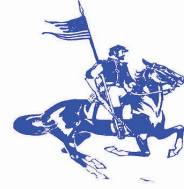
The 8% Well Spent

One of the perks of being president of the Roundtable is choosing the topics for the year's program (spoiler alert: this also entails responsibilities). Not by accident this year's Roundtable program has tilted towards the role of the U. S. Navy (USN) in the Civil War.

This past November Steve Pettyjohn spoke on Vicksburg, arguably the most important battle of the war. I have no doubt that Steve would agree with the assessment of General Grant who wrote, "Without the Navy's assistance the Vicksburg campaign could not have been made." In February Neil Evans provided us with a two-binder handout which documented how the U.S. Navy won the Civil War (Neil also gave President Lincoln some credit). At our meeting this month on April 8th we look forward to hearing William Vodrey discuss how USN Secretary Gideon Welles accomplished the herculean task of effectively administrating Navy's role in the war.

As a Navy veteran myself I am naturally inclined to see that the USN gets its due for victory in the Civil War. And I'm not the only one: a great historian, James M. McPherson, apparently also leans that way. But the difference between us is that Dr. McPherson by his usual meticulous scholarship has actually accumulated and analyzed the historical records to support his conclusions. This is evidenced by his book published in 2012, *War on the Waters: The Union and Confederate Navies, 1861-1865*. He notes several successful combined Union Army-Navy operations in decisive battles such as Island Number 10 on the Mississippi, Vicksburg, and Fort Fisher which led to the closing of the last major Confederate port in Wilmington, NC. And there were many other military successes in which the Navy was clearly in the lead such as New Orleans and Mobile Bay. Just prior to the latter victory which occurred on August 5, 1864 Northern morale and Lincoln's reelection prospects were at a low ebb because Grant appeared stalled outside Petersburg as did Sherman outside of Atlanta. Whether he actually said it or not, the spirit behind Admiral Farragut's supposed shout of "Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!" reinvigorated the war weary North.

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During much of the war Winfield Scott's Anaconda Plan of controlling the Mississippi River and blockading the extensive Southern coastline seemed wildly impractical and thus it was roundly criticized. But in the end the Navy was up to the enormous task of preventing sufficient crucial materials from getting into the South and keeping enough Southern cotton from getting out to the world market. While recognizing the blockade did not completely strangle the Confederacy, McPherson concludes, "Yet without the blockade, the Confederacy might have well prevailed." The U.S. government spent \$6.8 billion on military expenditures during the Civil War. The U.S. Navy accounted for 8% of that amount. Considering what it accomplished, I'd say that was money well spent.

A recent TV commercial shows various US Navy personnel in ever widening concentric circles. The tagline is, "To get to you, they have to get past us." As it did 150 years ago, the US Navy today continues to resolutely stand on watch to see that never happens.

Patrick Bray



Remember Our Next Meeting!

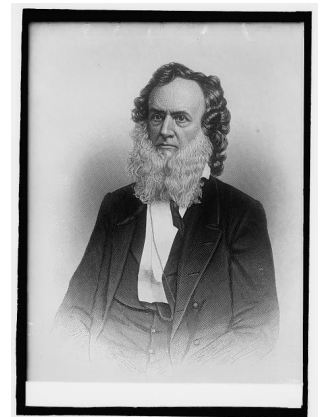
Lincoln's Father Neptune : Navy Secretary Gideon Welles

Presented by: William F.B. Vodrey

Wednesday - April 8, 2015

Judson Manor 1890 East 107th St. // Cocktails: 6pm Dinner 6:30pm

Please send an email to ccwrt1956@yahoo.com





Katherine Jane Chase, the daughter of Ohio politician, Salmon P. Chase was the envy of the Washington social set during the war years and beyond.

By the time Kate was born on August 13, 1840, her father had already lost one wife and child. He was to lose two more children and Kate's mother before the end of 1845. Chase's third also died but not before giving Kate a sister, Nettie. He would never marry again.

Being widowed and heavily involved in Ohio politics, Chase would groom Kate to become his hostess and social secretary, sending her to Miss Haines School in New York City to prepare her for society. While there, she was exposed to the finer things in life to which she became accustomed. Her father's expectations for her led him to become, it would seem, over-critical, filling his letters with advice and correcting her grammar whenever possible. Salmon Chase strove to be first and wanted the same for his daughter. The author projects little warmth between father and daughter, although she idolized him. The author describes their relationship as symbiotic: as time went on, she would help him politically and he would never marry, with the expectation that Salmon Chase would become President and Kate would be his First Lady.

Kate returned to Columbus in 1855 as her father was running for Governor of Ohio. With his election, she became his First Lady and secretary. At age 16 she was already turning heads and was known as the "Belle of Columbus". Salmon Chase campaigned for, and lost, the Republican presidential nomination in 1860, after which he became Lincoln's Treasury Secretary. While disappointed at the loss, Kate learned valuable political lessons, among them the need to be proactive and the importance of strategy.

The Chase family moved to Washington and Kate soon became the premier hostess in the Capitol just as she had in Columbus. Kate and Mary Lincoln "competed" for the position until the Lincoln's lost their son and Mary went into mourning. All of Kate's social events, everyone who was invited, the details down to the seating arrangements, were designed to further her father's career. Salmon had set his sights on the Presidency and Kate coveted the office as much as he did.

Her many admirers included Carl Schurz, John Hay and James Garfield; however, the man who won her heart was William Sprague IV, boy Governor of Rhode Island and heir to a textile empire. They first met in Cleveland, Ohio at the dedication ceremony of the Oliver Hazard Perry Monument. Their wedding on November 12, 1863 was the wedding of the decade, although it was soon realized that the marriage would be a rocky one. Measured by the standards of the day, it would seem she had everything. She was attractive, intelligent and had married into a wealthy family. Unfortunately, she would experience much unhappiness. She was exacting and soon found that her husband, far from a perfect man, fell short of her ideal. She spent much of her married life in Washington helping her father politically while Sprague ran the family business in Rhode Island, travelling to Washington when Congress was in session as he had been elected to the U. S. Senate.

The one man that did measure up to her standards and shared her burning ambition, her father, would never achieve his ultimate goal. Chase was hopeful of a presidential bid in 1864, but Lincoln appointed him Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, much to Kate's chagrin.



The birth of Kate's son, Willie, was a national event. Three daughters were to follow. Kate and her husband lived separate lives, she dividing her time between their mansion in Narragansett, Rhode Island, Washington and Europe.

With Lincoln's death, the Johnsons entered the White House, allowing Kate to maintain her position as the most sought after hostess in Washington. In 1868, Chase again pursued the presidency. Kate was his campaign manager and held a level of political power unprecedented for a woman up to that time. Grant won the nomination, and Kate never forgave those on Chase's staff whom she felt betrayed him.

Their marriage further declined due, in part, to her absences from home and her husband's drinking and unfaithfulness; she would not take her father's advice to be more submissive. Salmon Chase died in 1873 depriving Kate of the one man she admired. Following the Panic of 1873, the Sprague financial empire collapsed amidst accusations of treasonous business relations with the Confederacy during the war.

Kate entered into a relationship with Roscoe Conkling, the powerful New York senator, which lasted for many years. He was her intellectual and political equal. Conkling sought her counsel and she actively campaigned to further his considerable political influence. She became a Stalwart and friend of Chester Arthur, remaining active in Washington politics.

Financial ruin, the social scandal of her affair with Conkling and a well-publicized, acrimonious divorce from Sprague would damage her reputation and emotionally traumatize her family. Paradoxically it was only after she had lost many things that were once dear to her, did she find a measure of peace within herself.

Her last days were spent living in her father's crumbling house, taking care of her mentally challenged daughter and eking out a living selling vegetables from her garden. It was said that as she drove her one-horse wagon with her soiled white gloves through the streets of Washington delivering produce, she held her head high and was kind to everyone she met. Kate Chase died on July 31, 1899.

As a woman of the nineteenth century, her opportunities were limited, but she followed her own agenda behind the scenes. Had Kate lived today, she would probably have run for office, or had a professional career. No matter how one interprets her historical legacy, Kate Chase was one of the most influential women of her time.

Submitted by Jean Rhodes

Yale's Beinecke Library Buys Vast Collection of Lincoln Photos



BY WILLIAM GRIMES

The Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale has bought one of the largest private collections of 19th-century American photography from the Meserve-Kunhardt Foundation.

Read more at <http://nyti.ms/1bHSHu>



The War that Never Was: Britain, the U.S. and the Trent Affair

By William F.B. Vodrey

The Cleveland Civil War Roundtable

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***Editor's note:* This article was originally published in The Charger in the Fall of 2000.**

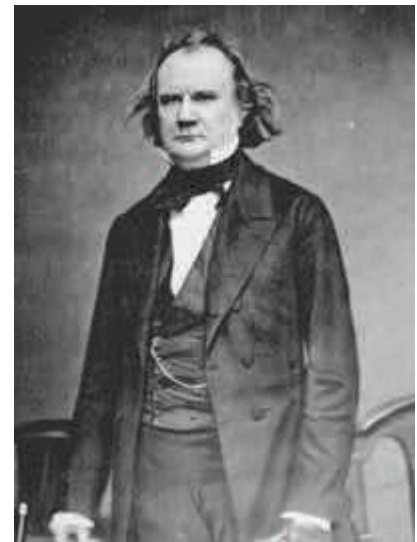
They say when it rains, it pours. And just when the United States was locked in a deadly struggle with the Confederacy, just when the military picture was at its bleakest, just when Abraham Lincoln's desk was piled highest, it looked very likely that Great Britain - the mightiest empire on the face of the Earth - would, for the third time in ninety years, wage war against us. Fortunately, it didn't happen. A conflict spanning the Atlantic was averted, and the U.S.-British war of 1861 became the war that never was.

By the fall of 1861, the Confederacy looked like it had a real chance to succeed. There had been victories at Ft. Sumter, at Bull Run, Big Bethel, Carthage, Wilson's Creek and Ball's Bluff, and more were in the offing. But Confederate President Jefferson Davis knew that if his new nation was to be assured of survival, powerful friends across the seas would be invaluable. He dispatched two diplomats, James M. Mason of Virginia and John Slidell of Louisiana, to be Confederate commissioners, or envoys. Mason and Slidell were to go to Britain and France, respectively. These were the military and economic superpowers of the day. Davis knew his history: French and Dutch help had been key to American success in the Revolution; now, perhaps, foreign assistance would help win Southern independence.

Mason and Slidell were originally to leave aboard the newly-refitted warship C.S.S. Nashville but, when the U.S. Navy got wind of the scheme and posted four warships to stop it, they left instead aboard a blockade runner and former privateer, the Gordon (also sometimes called the Theodora), on a \$10,000 charter. They snuck out from Charleston harbor after 1 a.m. on October 12, 1861 under cover of a heavy downpour. Their mission was no secret, although when and how they'd leave Southern shores was supposed to be.



Jefferson Davis



James Mason



Five days later the /Gordon/ put Mason and Slidell ashore at Cardenas, Cuba, and they took a train to Havana. The island of Cuba was at the time still part of the Spanish Empire, another European power remaining neutral in the Civil War but leaning a bit towards the Confederacy. In Havana, Mason and Slidell were wined and dined by the diplomatic community before transferring to a British mail steamer, the Trent, to continue their voyage to Europe.



John Slidell

However, patrolling off the Cuban coast was the steam sloop U.S.S. San Jacinto, commanded by Charles Wilkes. Wilkes had already made a name for himself as, according to historian Jay Monaghan, it was "a success partly marred by a [U.S. Navy] court-martial held after his return on charges [filed] by his disgruntled companions."

When he learned of the presence of Mason and Slidell on Cuban soil, Wilkes met with his officers to discuss the possibility of seizing the two Confederate emissaries. His first officer, Lt. Donald M. Fairfax, advised against it, noting that Americans had fought the War of 1812 in part because the British (ironically enough) had done just what Wilkes was now proposing to stop a neutral ship and remove, at gunpoint those he wished. Fairfax didn't change Wilkes's mind, though. On his own authority and without orders, he decided to stop the Trent and capture her Confederate passengers. On November 7, 1861, Wilkes intercepted the unarmed Trent in the Old Bahamas Channel, 300 miles east of Havana. He hoisted the Stars and Stripes and twice fired warning shots over her bow, forcing her to halt.



U.S.S. San Jacinto intercepts the British mail ship The Trent

By coincidence, the trans-Atlantic telegraph cable was out of commission at the time of Mason and Slidell's capture, and it was nearly two weeks before the Trent arrived in England, bringing news of the incident.

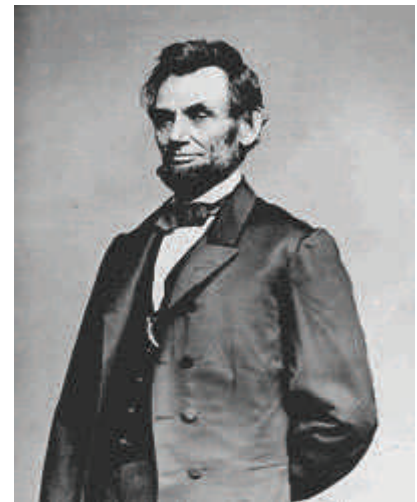
The British government was furious when it learned, on November 28, the full story of the illegal seizure. Lord Palmerston, the Prime Minister, told his Cabinet, "You may stand for this, but [I'll be] damned if I will!" The British monarch, Queen Victoria, shared Palmerston's outrage: "I have never seen so intense a feeling of indignation in my life." A senior American diplomat in London wrote that Mason and Slidell's seizure would "do more for the Southerners than ten victories, for it touches John Bull's honor, and the honor of his flag" (John Bull was the symbol of Britain at the time, much as Uncle Sam was and is of the U.S.).



As one historian wrote, "Lincoln watched every word that might be used against him by his enemies at home, who suspected that he planned to turn loose the prisoners. At the same time he left an open passage for retreat with honor if popular sentiment were sufficiently to permit him to do so. Had he said definitely that he would hold the commissioners it would have amounted to an ultimatum to Her Majesty's Government, and had he said definitely that he would return them he would have lost power at home. Only a few intimates noted Lincoln's guarded words, his hope for the cooling influence of time. Most of the people raged at what they called his indecision. Later they called it masterly intuition."



Charles Wilkes



Abraham Lincoln

After some stalling, the President decided to find a peaceful way out of the *Trent* crisis. "One war at a time," he is said to have remarked. In Cabinet meetings on Christmas Day and the day after, 1861, his administration adopted a face-saving compromise: Mason and Slidell would be released, but the U.S. would stand by its right to have arrested them in the first place. Seward briefed senior members of Congress, none of whom were delighted with the decision, but all of whom understood it.

The crisis was over. As historian Chester Hearn wrote, "The United States had lost face, but the Confederacy had lost her best opportunity for European intervention. During the balance of the war no other issue brought Great Britain so close to war." The U.S. had also obeyed international law, much to its credit; virtually any objective observer would agree that Capt. Wilkes had acted illegally in seizing diplomatic envoys from a neutral ship bound for a neutral port.

The *Trent* incident and its peaceful resolution by no means ended the threat of foreign intervention in the war. Still, the risk of foreign intervention was never as great as it was immediately after the *Trent* incident.