

THE CHARGER



CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

DEC. 2016

VOL. 38 #5

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Website : clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com

E-mail: m.wells@csuohio.edu or w.keating@csuohio.edu

Editors: Dennis Keating, Michael Wells

Newsletter Design: Catherine Wells

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

CHRISTMAS DURING THE CIVIL WAR

In this festive season when we gather with family and friends, when our tables are laden with delicacies and under our trees are mountains of presents from Santa, we pause to remember the Christmases of the Civil War when households were divided, tables were empty and children wondered if Santa would be able to come.

Here are just a few glimpses into those holidays.

While some Union soldiers enjoyed oysters and turkey, other soldiers had less. One Union soldier wrote that he turned from thoughts of the feast at home to his “oyster can full of coffee and a quarter ration of hard-tack and sow-belly.”

Requests for furloughs increased around the holidays and some could be very creative. Sergeant-Major Maxwell based his application on the book of Deuteronomy: And what man is there that betrothed a wife and hath not taken her? Let him go and return unto his house lest another man take her.” Then, boldly, he went further: “When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go to war...but he shall be free at home for one full year and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken.” His application was granted.



Alfred Bellard of the 5th New Jersey tells of the arrival of a Christmas tree in their camp. It was “stuck up in front of our tent, decked off with hard tack and pork, in lieu of cakes and oranges, etc.”

In 1864 Jefferson and Varina Davis threw a party for children at St. Paul Episcopal Church, giving out homemade presents of candles, dolls made from hickory nuts and Canton flannel, cotton and flannel rabbits, dogs and cats.

Santa Claus distributes gifts to Union troops in [Nasf's](#) first Santa Claus [cartoon](#), (1863)

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Increasingly, the Union blockade prevented goods from coming into the South. Mothers had to explain to their children that Santa would not be coming to bring them presents. Ella Clanton of Augusta, Georgia told her children that Santa had gone off to war, but when she saw that, trusting that he would come somehow, they faithfully hung their little stockings, she managed to find something to put into them.

Sallie Putnam in Richmond plotted the course that Santa would need to take to avoid the blockade to arrive at her house.

Henry Kyd Douglas of Stonewall Jackson's staff was imprisoned at Johnson's Island in December, 1863 and had received several boxes. "A friend had sent me in a package a bottle of old brandy. On Christmas morning I quietly called some comrades up to my bunk to taste the precious fluid of...disappointment! The bottle had been opened outside, the brandy taken and replaced with water, adroitly recorded and sent it (sic)." I hope the Yankee who played that practical joke lived to repent it and was shot before the war ended."

Finally, in Savannah, on Christmas Day in 1864, where people had little reason to celebrate, 90 Michigan men and their captain loaded several wagons full of food and supplies and distributed them to civilians living outside the city in the ravaged countryside. The mules were made to look like reindeer with tree-branch antlers strapped to their heads.

(Taken from *Civil War Times*, December, 1998)

A very happy Holiday Season to you all!

Jean



Other Interesting Civil War Christmas Resources

"The All-American Christmas-isn't" The Smithsonian Associates Civil War E-Mail Newsletter, Volume 7, Number 3

"Christmas During the Civil War on the Homefront" Civil War Trust

Play (by Paula Vogel): "A Civil War Christmas: An American Musical Celebration"



This Month: *The Case of the Murder of Bull Nelson*

In Kentucky, Braxton Bragg and Kirby Smith were driving a two-pronged offensive that threatened Louisville and Cincinnati. As Don Carlos Buell raced northward with the Army of the Ohio to blunt this juggernaut, he entrusted the safety of Louisville to his most trusted subordinate Major General William "Bull" Nelson. Brigadier General Jefferson C. Davis offered his services to Nelson, but resented the duties he was asked to perform. Davis and Nelson had a heated confrontation in Nelson's headquarters, and Davis was ordered to leave the city. A week later, a still disgruntled Davis confronted Nelson in the lobby of the Galt House Hotel. When Nelson rebuffed Davis' demand for an apology, Davis shot and killed him in front of numerous witnesses. Davis ultimately was never punished for the crime. Robert I. Girardi will examine all the facts of this case, providing insight based on his 24 years of experience as a Chicago Police Homicide Detective.

Robert Girardi received his M. A. in Public History from Loyola University and has had a lifelong interest in the Civil War, having authored or edited several books on the subject. He is a past president of the Civil War Roundtable of Chicago.

Next Month...

Faces of the Civil War by C. Ellen Connally and Jean Rhodes, presented by Dan Zeiser

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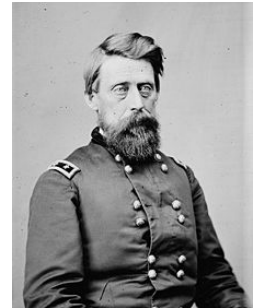
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Jefferson C. Davis and the Ebenezer Creek Controversy

By Dennis Keating



In addition to the murder of General “Bull” Nelson, Union General Jefferson C. Davis is also remembered for what occurred on December 9, 1864 at Ebenezer Creek, Georgia. As Sherman’s army neared Savannah in its March to the Sea, the 14,000 man XIV Corps commanded by Davis was the rear guard. Union engineers had to place a pontoon bridge across the creek swollen by rain to replace a removed bridge. As the troops passed over the creek, they were trailed by a mass of former slaves that was following Sherman’s army across Georgia.

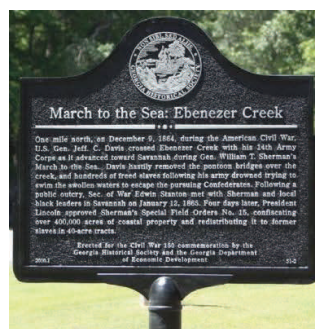
Once the last Union troops had crossed the creek, Davis ordered the pontoon bridge removed immediately. This left a large number of black refugees stranded on the western bank with Confederate General Joe Wheeler’s cavalry closing in on them. Upon their arrival, his scouts exchanged shots with Union soldiers, who attempted to help blacks who attempted to swim across to escape death or recapture by the Confederates. Hundreds, including women and children, died in their unsuccessful attempts to swim across or use logs thrown to them by Union soldiers. Both Sherman and Davis had previously been unhappy about having these refugees trying to escape and traveling along with the army and seeking protection and food.

A couple of officers of the 16th Illinois were outraged by the deaths of so many entrapped refugees and alerted the U.S. Senate Military Commission. This was leaked to the press and got the attention of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. After Sherman’s capture of Savannah, Stanton arrived in January to investigate. Davis was considered hostile to the Negroes by Stanton but Sherman defended Davis on military grounds against charges that he deliberately intended to cut off the refugees from following his corps anymore. Stanton then called a meeting on January 12 with twenty black church leaders (sixteen were former slaves) and Sherman. The church leaders asked for land separate from whites. On January 16, 1865, Sherman issued Field Order No. 15. It set aside about 400,000 acres along the Atlantic coast from Charleston to Jacksonville in 40-acre plots for the freed slaves. This is said to be the origin of the promise of 40 acres and a mule. This land and the black settlers came under the control of the Freedman’s Bureau after the war but President Andrew Johnson ordered the confiscated land returned to its owners.

References

Rick Beard. “Forty Acres and a Mule” *New York Times* (January 16, 2015)

James Lee McDonough. *William Tecumseh Sherman: In the Service of My Country, a Life*. 2016: W.W. Norton & Company



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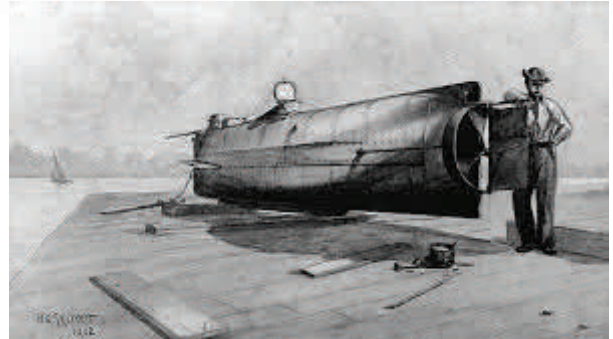
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A VISIT TO THE H. L. HUNLEY, OR A DOSE OF SOUTHERN CULTURE

Paul Siedel

Every year it happens, we receive invitations to fundraisers for our pet causes and each year we say "Next year I'm going to do this." Well this year was my year to take in the annual "Friends of the Hunley" barbecue and oyster roast in Charleston S. C. What an experience it was. It was a ten hr. drive down I 77 to Columbia S.C., which is well worth taking in if one is a Civil War Buff. The next day it was on to Charleston, which is a fantastic tourist town for anyone that is interested in any aspect of American History. The day of the members' tour arrived and I drove to the Warren Lasch Conservation and Research Center in North Charleston. A huge hall named after Mr. Warren Lasch a former Clevelander now affiliated with Clemson University. Inside we were shown the ongoing recovery efforts by a group of conservators, and the slow painstaking work it takes to bring this Civil War submarine back from the dead. We were shown how each article was desalinated by leaching out salt water and replacing it with a polyethylene solution that will keep the submarine and artifacts from deteriorating. Much of this is groundbreaking work and many of these methods have never before been used. The vessel itself is submerged in a huge tank of desalinization solution which must be drained each time research is done. A very moving sight, and one I will remember for a long time to come.



At 7:00 that evening I met some friends and we took in a good old southern oyster roast. Held in the bus barn where tourists meet their tour busses, we were treated to all the pulled pork, cold slaw, baked beans and rolls we could eat. Then came the oysters. Huge baskets about the size of a stretcher were thrown onto tables made of plywood. As I stood there wondering what to do, the crowd dove in and began shucking and devouring oysters at an amazing rate. I acquired an oyster knife and my friend Mary Ellen showed a Yankee how to shuck and eat oysters. In the middle of the table was a huge hole under which was a fifty gallon drum, and as one eats the oyster they throw the shell into the barrel. Needless to say, that combined with a good glass of beer this whole affair put me in a food lover's "seventh heaven". There were easily three hundred in attendance and a live band played country music. After about two hours, I managed to make it back to the car and back to the hotel room. This event is definitely on my calendar for many years to come. There was a very touching story told by the one of the staff regarding the "Hunley" and how it effects people even today. The ship was lost in February 1864, after sinking the U.S.S. "Housatonic". She signaled the crew on shore that she had accomplished her mission and was coming in. She never did. The "Hunley" vanished and was never seen again for one hundred and thirty one years. There were no survivors. The ship was captained by Captain George Dixon, and his fiancé, although she lived on until 1933, never spoke of Dixon or the War. Upon her death, the family members were going through her effects and came upon an old scrapbook which contained pictures of the people who had made up her life. One page held a photo of a young man who no one in the family could identify. In 2014, as the descendants were going through the Conservation Center, they were shown the facial reconstructions of the crew members. The face of the "Hunley's" Captain George Dixon bore a striking resemblance to the photo in the old scrapbook.

Mysteries of the "Hunley"

- What actually happened to the "Hunley"? To this very day no one knows why the ship never resurfaced after the attack on the "Housatonic" Many theories continue to be put forth, however none have been proven.
- What happened to the crew members? There was no evidence of panic. The skeletal remains were found at each man's duty station.
- Why was part of the propeller guard missing?

A very good book concerning the "Hunley" is "Sea Of Darkness" by Brian Hicks.

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“The Lincoln Legacy: The Man and His Presidency”

By William F.B. Vodrey

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Tony Kushner, screenwriter of Steven Spielberg’s movie *Lincoln*, and Sarah Vowell, author of *Assassination Vacation*, appeared at the Maltz Center on November 29 as part of Case Western Reserve University’s Think Forum speaker series. CWRU Prof. Jerrold Scott acted as moderator for a lively, interesting discussion of Civil War history and pop culture.

Scott asked how Kushner and Vowell came to be interested in Lincoln, and Kushner said he never really focused on Lincoln until Spielberg asked him to write the screenplay. Even then, he was reluctant, given all that had already been written about the 16th President. Spielberg brought together a group of Lincoln scholars including Doris Kearns Goodwin, and Kushner asked them many, many questions. Goodwin encouraged Kushner to take on the job, saying, “Whether this project is a success or a failure, you will be glad to have spent a few years with Lincoln.” He finally decided to do it, and then found himself calling Goodwin several times a week with additional questions while writing the script. Vowell, by contrast, said Lincoln’s writing grabbed her early on. Since Lincoln didn’t have the deep bass voice we associate with weighty words, she often asks her friend, the nasally-voiced humorist David Sedaris, to read Lincoln’s words whenever they appear together at public events. Kushner and Vowell both credited Lincoln with creating a new American form of prose, simple, straightforward and clear, which Mark Twain and Ulysses S. Grant later built upon.

The Oscar-winning actor Daniel Day-Lewis, preparing for the role of Lincoln, didn’t want to speak in Lincoln’s voice for Spielberg until he’d “worked on it” for awhile, Kushner said, and even then only sent a cassette player (with the cassette still stuck in it) from Ireland, making the director promise not to let anyone else listen. Day-Lewis, who is known for becoming deeply immersed in his roles, told Kushner he wouldn’t speak to the screenwriter during filming so that he could maintain his focus. “A couple of times I had to duck down behind soldiers and things on the set so that he wouldn’t see me,” Kushner said.

Kushner’s first draft of the screenplay was 500 pages long, but Spielberg was most taken with the first 150, about the fight to pass the 13th Amendment, and that’s what became the core of the movie. Kushner and Vowell discussed the cinematic quality of Lincoln’s time in the White House, with Vowell noting that the sun dramatically came out just as the President was going to give his second inaugural address on March 4, 1865. And what Shakespeare play arrived at the White House in an elegant folio from New York City, ordered by Mrs. Lincoln herself, the week of the assassination? None other than *Julius Caesar*, about the murder of another beloved and reviled leader. “That’s the great thing about nonfiction – it doesn’t have to be plausible,” Vowell said.

Kushner spoke about Lincoln’s many-faceted character – he could be very warm and generous, but also sometimes cold and calculating. Vowell said he would sometimes agonize over pardons, but allowed a convicted spy, John Y. Beall, to be executed (for, among other crimes, plotting to free Confederate prisoners on Johnson’s Island) after purposefully keeping those seeking a pardon from seeing him in the White House. Lincoln “was an adoring father but could be shockingly negligent,” Kushner said, as when he let his son Tad wander about the Virginia State Capitol unattended while he was speaking to state leaders, just after the fall of Richmond in what was still a very dangerous city.

During the public Q&A period afterwards, a person in the crowd asked if the scene in which the President and First Lady heatedly argued was “just Hollywood” or was based on the historical record. Kushner said there were several contemporary accounts of the Lincolns quarreling, including by Mrs. Lincoln’s dressmaker and confidante, Elizabeth Keckley. Nevertheless, he said he wanted to show, despite the occasional storminess of the marriage, how close the Lincolns were, and what an important role Mrs. Lincoln played in her husband’s political success.

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Lincoln legacy cont.

Another audience member asked if there had been any thought of reparations for freed slaves at the close of the Civil War. Kushner and Vowell seemed bemused by the question and said no, but discussed ambitious proposals by Thaddeus Stevens and others to dismantle the Southern slave-owning aristocracy and establish freed slaves with farms of their own on confiscated lands. These proposals went nowhere in Congress, however, even before Reconstruction ended.

When it was my turn at the microphone, I mentioned I was with the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable and gave our website address, inviting anyone interested in further discussions of Lincoln to look us up. Vowell joked that not all roundtables are big Lincoln admirers, and I said, "You're in Union-blue Ohio now, Miss Vowell." Then I asked what they thought of Lincoln's decision to drop Hannibal Hamlin from the ticket in 1864, which made political sense at the time but turned out to be a very bad idea, given the many problems of Andrew Johnson's Presidency. Kushner said he thought Lincoln was overthinking the problem - dumping Hamlin was "inarguably one of Lincoln's worst mistakes" in office. He believed Lincoln still could've won with Hamlin as his running mate, and that would've been better for the country. There had been several assassination attempts against Lincoln already by 1864 - Vowell pointed out that he kept an "Assassination" file for all the death threats he got - and Lincoln should have understood there was a distinct risk he wouldn't serve a full second term. And if worse came to worst, Kushner said, Lincoln should have known that Hamlin would be a better successor than Johnson.

In response to another question, the pair discussed Lincoln's personal secretaries John Nicolay and John Hay, whom Kushner praised as "a remarkable team." Nicolay was "imbued by German radicalism" and that had an impact on Lincoln, Kushner believes, while Hay was a "brilliant manager of people" who helped the President on Capitol Hill (and was "really, really, really cute," Kushner said with a smile). Later, of course, the pair would write the first great account of Lincoln's life and times. Vowell encouraged those present to visit Hay's elegant tomb in nearby Lakeview Cemetery.

Roundtable members Pat Bray, Paul Burkholder, Buddy Doyle, Dennis Keating, Paul Siedel and Mike Wells were among those in the near-capacity crowd for the event. We warmly applauded Vowell and Kushner at the end. The huge turnout proved that Abraham Lincoln is of great and enduring interest to his countrymen even now, more than a century and a half after his death.



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Civil War Television Viewing

Beginning on December 14 (10 PM), the American Heroes Channel (AHC)

will begin its "Blood & Fury: America's Civil War" series



featuring 6 battles.

**Looking Back On December 14 in the Civil War
by Dennis Keating**



December 14, 1862: The day after Ambrose Burnside's disastrous failed attacks against Robert E. Lee at Fredericksburg

December 14, 1864: The day before George Thomas' rout of John Bell Hood's shrunken force besieging Nashville after his catastrophic attack against John Schofield at Franklin



Gift Suggestions 2016 Civil War Books by Dennis Keating

For both givers and receivers of gifts during this holiday season, consider these Civil War book titles among others published in 2016:

- * Paul D. Escott. *Paying Freedom's Price: A History of African Americans in the Civil War.*
- * Earl J. Hess. *Braxton Bragg: The Most Hated Man in the Confederacy*
- * Chris Mackowski. *Hell Itself: The Battle of the Wilderness, May 5-7, 1864.*
- * James Lee McDonough. *William Tecumseh Sherman: In the Service of My Country.*
- * Robert O'Harrow. *The Quartermaster: Montgomery C. Meigs, Lincoln's General, Master Builder of the Union Army.*
- * Timothy B. Smith. *Grant Invades Tennessee: The 1862 Battles for Forts Henry and Donelson.*
- * Ronald C. White. *American Ulysses: A Life of Ulysses S. Grant.*
- * Eric Wittenberg and Daniel Davis. *Out Flew the Sabres: The Battle of Brandy Station, June 9, 1863.*

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JOIN US FOR OUR NEXT MEETING



Dec. 14 , 2016

Drinks @ 6pm, Dinner @ 6:30 Judson Manor

East 107th St & Chester

Program: *The Case of the Murder of Bull Nelson* by Robert Girardi



BECAUSE YOU ASKED.....

In response to several requests, beginning in December, our meetings will begin at 6:30 p.m. Please mark your calendars accordingly.

Jean

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