

October, 2006

435th Meeting

Vol. 28 #2

Tonight's

Program:

Images

Mary Ann Ball was born in Knox County, Ohio in 1817. By 1861 after the outbreak of the Civil War, Mary Ann was Mrs. Bickerdyke and was living in Galesburg, Knox County, Illinois. During that first summer of the War, Edward Beecher (brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher) visited Galesburg and spoke at the Congregational Church.



The service included the reading of a letter written by a man from Galesburg telling of the poor conditions of the military camp at Cairo, Illinois, where several hundred of Galesburg's men were stationed.

The congregation prepared to send supplies for the men at Cairo and suggested that Mary Ann Bickerdyke accompany them. Mrs. Bickerdyke was then forty-four years old, a widow with two young sons. Mary Ann agreed to take the supplies to Cairo. She devoted the next four years to the cause. It is believed that she ministered to the needs of the wounded in no less than nineteen battles, bettering the lives of the soldiers who gave her the nickname "Mother Bickerdyke". She gained the respect of Generals Grant and Sherman.

Following the war she returned to Galesburg. Later she traveled through Kansas and California. She was instrumental in obtaining pensions for veterans and for Civil War nurses. By 1901, she had returned to her childhood home in Knox County, Ohio, where she died. She was buried in Galesburg. A monument in her honor stands on the lawn of the Court-house of Knox County, Illinois. Upon the monument is a phrase which exemplifies Mother Bickerdyke's importance in the Civil War: General Sherman's quote claiming, "She outranks me."

Tonight's Speakers:

Karen Thyer and Don Allen

Images is a duo of musicians specializing in music of the civil war era. The group is well known for its thoughtful interpretations of popular songs of the time, performances based on careful research and attention to historical detail.

Don and Karen, who play mountain dulcimer, fiddle, banjo, and guitar, bring those distant times to life. Their goal is to conjure a mental picture of each song, giving listeners a more profound understanding of the meaning it holds.

The members of Images often can be seen in period costume at historical programs and reenactments, portraying agents of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, which was the forerunner of the American Red Cross. They also hold workshops, at which they present the historical background of the music and characters they reenact.

**Date: Wednesday,
October 11, 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: Breast of Chicken
or Vegetarian Dinner**

CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

FOUNDED 1957

President: **John Fazio** (330) 867-1535
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Cleveland Civil War Roundtable Past Presidents

2006 Dave Carrino	1981 Thomas Geschke
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2001 William Vodrey	1976 Milton Holmes
2000 Bob Boyda	1975 Thomas Gretter
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1993 Kevin Callahan	1968 Frank Moran
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1984 Neil Evans	1959 John Cullen, Jr.
1983 William Victory	1958 George Farr, Jr.
1982 John Harkness	1957 Kenneth Grant

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

OCTOBER, 2006

Let us welcome Katherine Thyer and Don Allen, who will tell us something about the U.S. Sanitary Commission and also entertain us with Civil War music that, then as now, soothed the savage beasts. The latter, of course, have always played a major role in our lives. There is, for example, the noble horse, whose purpose is to do *everything* except to be eaten by us; the noble cow, pig, and sheep, whose purpose is to do *nothing* except to be eaten by us; and the noble lion, tiger, and komodo dragon, whose purpose is to *eat* us.

So enamored are we of animals, in fact, that we even invent some. There is, for example, the centaur, which has the head, trunk, and arms of a man and the body and legs of a horse, and is said to be fearless in battle, after which it is given to riotous revelries, often with the satyr, which is part human, part horse, and sometimes part goat, who is a notorious womanizer, usually skips the battles, and goes right to the revelry. Then there is the flim, which has the head of a lion and the body of a lawyer, with a beak like that of a woodpecker, which it uses to carve hearts in the bark of trees. This animal is not to be confused with its close relative, the flam, which has the head of a tiger and the body of a tiger, though not the same tiger. It, too, has a bird's beak, which it sometimes uses to carve arrows through the hearts carved by the flim, thus signaling the flim its readiness to mate. When the two work in concert like this, they are known as flim-flam artists. What has all this to do with the war? I will tell you next month because I am out of space.

John Fazio

**CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE
2006/2007 SCHEDULE**

September 13, 2006

**The 13th Tennessee (Union),
The Men Who Killed
The Invader of Ohio,
John Hunt Morgan**

Dick Crews

October 11, 2006

Images

Karen Thyer portrays Mother Bickerdyke (1817-1901), Botanical Physician, "Cyclone in Calico," and Don Allen portrays a U.S. Sanitary Commission Inspector, singing songs of the Union and Confederacy

November 8, 2006

**Cleveland CWRT
50th Anniversary Celebration**



Lincoln at Gettysburg

Mel Maurer

December 13, 2006

**The Confederacy's New
Mexico Campaign
The Battles of Valverde and
Glorieta Pass**

Dan Zeiser

January 10, 2007

**The Annual Dick Crews
Debate**

*Resolved: That the Institution of
slavery was the cause of the Civil
War*

Moderator: William Vodrey

February 14, 2007

Ohio's Civil War Governors



**William F. B.
Vodrey**



March 14, 2007

**Custer's Last
Stand**

Harold A. George



April 11, 2007

**The Lincoln-Baldwin
Conference**

James Epperson

May 9, 2007

**The Civil War Letters
of Private Alfred Weedon,
26th Ohio Volunteer
Infantry - A
Hands-on Lesson in
History**
Jon Thompson



THE BARLOW-GORDON CONTROVERSY:

REST IN PEACE

by John C. Fazio

[Editor's Note: Last year, the author penned articles about Francis and Arabella Barlow and John and Fanny Gordon. He promised to enlighten us about the controversy surrounding Barlow and Gordon that arose after the war. Here he enlightens us.]

The human interest story about the relationship between Francis C. Barlow, the Northern "Puritan" who rose to the rank of division commander, from private, in the Army of the Potomac, and John B. Gordon, the Southern "Cavalier" who rose in rank from captain to corps commander in the Army of Northern Virginia, is one of the most famous of the Civil War. The story concerns Gordon's perhaps life-saving ministrations to a stricken Barlow on Blocher's Knoll (now Barlow's Knoll) on the first day of Gettysburg, his arrangement of safe passage for Arabella, who then made her way to her husband and nursed him back to health, the later suppositions of the commanders that neither had survived the war, and their subsequent meetings, particularly the first, at a Washington dinner party, where they were, as it were, resurrected to each other.

The story was apparently first published in 1879 by various newspapers around the country after an unidentified Washington, D.C. correspondent for the *Boston Transcript* wrote it. One of the newspapers was the *Dublin Post* of Dublin, Georgia, Gordon's home state. We know it came from the pen of the correspondent because the *National Tribune*, another newspaper that published the story, gave it that attribution. It appeared later in *McClure's Magazine* (once in the 1880's and again in June, 1894), Vol. XXI of the *Southern Historical Society Papers* (1893), *Campfire and Battlefield* (1894), James A. Scrymser's *In Time of Peace and War* (1915), a volume titled *New York State*, issued in 1923 to commemorate the unveiling of a statue of Barlow on the knoll, *The Shaping of a Battle: Gettysburg* (1959), by James Montgomery, *Generals in Blue* (1964), by Ezra Warner, *John Brown Gordon: Soldier, Southerner, American* (1989), by Ralph Lowell Eckert, and *Gettysburg: The First Day* (2001), by Harry W. Pfanz. Articles on the subject include: "A Gettysburg Myth Exploded," by William F. Hanna, *Civil War Times Illustrated* (May, 1985), "The Barlow - Gordon Incident," by Gary Kross, *Blue and Gray Magazine* (December, 2001), a response to the Kross article by Gregory C. White, *Blue and Gray Magazine* (February, 2002), and "Encounter on Blocher's Knoll," by Richard F. Welch, *America's Civil War* (March, 2004). The story, and commentary on it, have obviously become a Civil War item.

Three months before his death in 1904, Gordon published his memoirs, titled *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, which he wrote during the period 1891-1897. In it, he said that when his men overran the knoll he saw Barlow fall from his horse. He rode up, looked at him, saw that he was not dead, and dismounted. He gave him water from his canteen, but because his wound was so grave, including paralysis, he fully expected him to die. He directed some of his subordinates to carry Barlow into the shade, but before leaving him, Barlow asked him to destroy some of his wife's letters that he had on his person and to tell his wife of their meeting on the field and that his last thoughts were of her. Gordon learned that Arabella was near the battlefield and so at the close of day he sent word to her of her husband's condition and granted her safe passage through his lines to be with him. About a year

later, he added, his kinsman with the same last name and initials was killed. Barlow, who had recovered, heard of it and assumed it was Gordon. So both men assumed that the other did not survive the war. Fifteen years passed. Both men were invited to a dinner party in Washington by Clarkson Potter, a Congressman from New York. At table, Gordon peered at Barlow and asked: "General, are you related to the Barlow who was killed at Gettysburg?" Barlow answered: "Why, I am the man, sir. Are you related to the Gordon who killed me?" Gordon responded: "I am the man sir." At which time, of course, they hugged and cemented a friendship that lasted until the end of their days.

In a speech Gordon gave dozens of times, perhaps hundreds times, between 1893 and 1904, the year of his death, titled "The Last Days of the Confederacy," he told essentially the same story, with minor variations.

In an incomplete letter to his mother, Almira Penniman Barlow, dated July 7, 1863, Barlow told a story similar to Gordon's, but with substantial differences. Foremost is a complete omission of any mention of Gordon. In addition, he said that two of his men tried to carry him from the field, but failed, and that he lay in the field for about five minutes before the enemy came up. He says that "Major Pitzer" had him carried into the woods. He then describes his diagnosis by surgeons (terminal) and his subsequent care in Gettysburg by his captors and by civilians.

In a subsequent letter to Almira, undated, but written before August 5, 1863, Barlow said that while he was lying on the knoll, he remembered that he had incriminating letters on his person (incriminating because they related to his nomination as the "Negro Superintendent") so he destroyed them before the enemy reached him.

Apart from Barlow's saying that he destroyed letters, the accounts seem to tell a reasonably clear and coherent story. Unfortunately, they are not clear and coherent enough for some students of the war, who contend that the whole story is "a fable," "apocryphal," "highly unlikely," "a contrivance," "a myth," "fiction," "bogus." This view received its most definitive expression by William Hanna in his article that appeared in the May, 1985, issue of *Civil War Times Illustrated*, referred to above. Numerous reasons are given, by Hanna and others, for the contention that the meeting never took place, including:

1. There are inconsistencies between Gordon's two accounts.
2. There are inconsistencies between Gordon's accounts and Barlow's accounts, especially Barlow's failure to mention Gordon or Arabella in his letter of July 7 and the business about the letters.
3. Arabella was working at a Christian commission in Maryland during the Gettysburg fighting and it is therefore unlikely that she could have made it to the battlefield in time to care for her husband, which is borne out by the fact that he does not mention her in the July 7 letter.

4. It is inconceivable that Gordon did not know that Barlow subsequently fought against him in Grant's Overland Campaign of 1864.
5. Gordon was a very powerful voice in the movement to heal and move on after the war. The Barlow story was only an attempt on his part to effect a reconciliation of the regions based on mutual admiration for the heroism of the foe.

Let us consider each of these objections in the light of the sources, our knowledge of human nature, and reason.

First, the inconsistencies in Gordon's two accounts are all minor variations of a kind that one would expect in the telling and retelling of an event. In their essentials, the accounts tell the same story and are therefore more likely to be true than false. Indeed, minor variations are the mark of truth rather than falsity; identical or substantially identical stories reflect copying.

Second, except for Barlow's failure to mention Gordon or Arabella and the business of the letters, the inconsistencies between Gordon's and Barlow's accounts are of minutia and are easily and reasonably attributable to differences of perception and interpretation, taking into consideration all of the surrounding circumstances and the condition of the principals.

As for the letters, how did Barlow destroy them when he was lying on his back nearly dead and possibly completely paralyzed? By his own testimony, he was too faint to walk, did not expect to get out alive, was in considerable pain, and his clothing was saturated with blood. I submit that in these circumstances there is really only one explanation for the apparent conflict in the primary sources, and it is this: Barlow did not himself destroy the letters on his person; he was in no condition to do that. But he knew about the incriminating letters and it was thus a matter of great importance to him that they not fall into the hands of the enemy. So he got rid of them (i.e. he "destroyed" them) the only way he possibly could -- by getting someone else to do it for him. That someone else was none other than John B. Gordon! That is the only explanation that squares with all three accounts, with reason, and with probabilities rather than possibilities. That Gordon mentions letters in both *Reminiscences* and *Last Days* makes it very probable the letters were a part of the happening that occurred between him and Barlow on the knoll. That Barlow also mentions letters in his account makes the case even more compelling. That both men expressly speak of the *destruction* of letters makes it somewhere between very probable and nearly certain that they are talking about the same transaction. The stew is simply too thick to suppose that they are talking about separate letter incidents. Postulating that they are talking about the same incident is the key that opens all doors.

With respect to the July 7 letter, the first thing that needs to be said is that it is incomplete: pages are missing. There is simply no way of knowing whether or not he mentioned Gordon or Arabella or both in the missing pages. That the letter does not mention Arabella has not been taken as evidence that she never came. That Gordon is not mentioned in the incomplete letter should likewise not preclude his having helped Barlow in the way he says he did. A lot of possibilities can be offered as to why Barlow did not mention Gordon in his letter

(assuming there is no mention in the portion of the letter that did not survive), namely: Barlow was almost certainly in a state of shock at the time, probably delirious, and for that reason may have had only a very dim recollection, assuming he had any at all, of the first person to attend to him; Gordon says quite clearly that he did not linger with Barlow, that he did what was asked of him by Barlow, promised him that he would get word to Arabella, and then turned him over to his subordinates for further care; Barlow may have deliberately omitted Gordon from his narrative because of what he had requested of him, i.e., to destroy Arabella's *billets-doux*.

With respect to the third reason for doubting the authenticity of the meeting, i.e. Arabella's coming to the battlefield, first things first. Is there any doubt that she came? None whatsoever. Is there any doubt as to when she came? None; she came the evening of July 1. Then why does Barlow not mention her in his letter of July 7? One can conceive of reasons, but it really matter little. What matters is that we know with certainty that she came to him well before July 7, that he nevertheless does not mention her in the surviving part of his letter of that date, and that such failure to mention her does not negate her coming, in the same way that failure to mention Gordon's acts of kindness does not negate their meeting.

In an article entitled "After the Battle" that appeared in the December 31, 1885, edition of *The National Tribune*, General O.O. Howard, Commander of the XI Corps at Gettysburg, wrote at great length about Francis and Arabella, spoke glowingly of both and included the following material that is relevant here:

I can never forget how speedily, as if led by instinct, (Barlow's) good wife found her way from Frederick or Baltimore to our lines after they had been established on the Cemetery Ridge. She said, as she found me not far from the Cemetery gates: "Gen. Howard, my husband is wounded and left within the enemy's lines, I MUST GO TO HIM..." She said, "They will not fire at me," and so started rapidly down the Baltimore Pike toward the court-house..."I cannot get through there," she said. She undertook this bold enterprise once again. "I will go there," pointing to the left, "where both sides can see me." She did so, and this time succeeded in passing through both skirmish-lines and reaching her husband.

Arabella's arrival on July 1 receives corroboration from Gordon's statement, in *Last Days*, that "Late that night (i.e. the night of July 1 - July 2), as I lay in the open field upon my saddle, a picket from the front announced a lady on my lines. It was Mrs. Barlow. She was carried to her husband's side during the night by my staff."

[Next month: The rest of the story.]

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John C. Fazio



50th Anniversary Celebration!



At our November meeting, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable. On November 20, 1956, the Roundtable met for the first time. Please join us in celebrating this momentous occasion. Bring a guest, particularly one who may be interested in joining the group.

If you have any thoughts as to how to celebrate, please contact John Fazio, President at 330-665-3000 (office), 330-867-1535 (home), or johncfazio@verizon.net. Happy Anniversary!

NEXT MONTH

**LINCOLN AT GETTYSBURG
MEL MAURER**