

THE CHARGER



CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

DEC. 2018

VOL. 40 # 4

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Message From the President

American Civil War historians – welcome to the December issue of the Charger!

At our November meeting, our speaker Chris Kolakowski continued on with my series theme of “Southern Invasions and Raids of the North” with his presentation entitled “Perryville, Battle for Kentucky”. In a dynamic oration, Chris dissected Bragg’s Kentucky campaign. I concluded that the south lost a big opportunity to make headway in the Ohio River Valley. One new takeaway for me was Chris’s contention that Bragg really wanted a two part battle a’la what was happening at about the same time in Maryland with South Mountain followed by Antietam. Chris theorized that Perryville was the opener similar to South Mountain, but that a potentially good defensive position at Herrodsburg was to be the main battle where Bragg would break the north. For a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the particularly arid summer in Kentucky in 1862 (that I had not even considered prior to Kolakowski’s presentation), it did not materialize and Bragg retreated.

Also, at our November meeting we honored America’s participation in WWI and in particular the 100th year anniversary of Pershing’s crucial October and November 1918 Meuse-Argonne offensive that turned the tide in favor of the allies – *thanks* to Kirk Stewart for displaying his impressive WW I firearms – that after his collection of edged weapons which he showed us in October, Kirk truly “went the extra mile” to honor the memory of the “Dough Boys” and enlighten our Roundtable.\

We are in for a great December meeting as Ed Bearss, Chief Historian Emeritus of the National Park Service, returns to our Round Table! The focus will remain in the Western Theater as we hear Mr. Bearss enlighten us on Nathan Bedford Forrest with the topic: “Nathan Bedford Forrest Vanquishes Union Cavalry – While allowing Sherman to Capture Atlanta”. We are truly honored that he is coming to Cleveland - it is super, fantastic & unbelievable that Mr. Bearss will be with us – additionally, I cannot think of any other Historian more qualified to talk on Forrest!!! Mr. Bearss indicated to me that he will be happy to autograph books, etc. after his lecture– however; he will not be bringing any books for sale so you will need to arrive with said book in hand.

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Special thanks to Ohio expatriate Dick Crews who had lunch with Mr. Bearss last winter and broached the idea. Seeing the possibility as valid, Dick put me in touch with Mr. Bearss, and as they say, “the rest is history”!

Looking even further ahead to our January 9th, 2019 meeting – and speaking of Dick Crews - we will have “The Dick Crews Annual Debate”. Our topic this year is, "If Lee had won at Gettysburg, could he have gone on to capture Washington, D.C.?" Thanks to William Vodrey who will again moderate this enjoyable evening. He's looking for four debaters, two per side (first come, first served in making your pick), who will be prepared to speak for five minutes, take questions for two minutes, and then at the end, rebut the other debaters. The winner will, of course, receive tremendous notoriety and fabulous prizes. It's sensational fun, as past debaters could tell you, and you don't need to be an expert by any means. If you'd like to take part, please let William know if you haven't already, ASAP.

One of my favorite aspects of military history is the “What if”? History is replete with examples of one or two apparently insignificant – *or significant* - things that could have gone differently at the time, and result in a completely different outcome. All of us can think of an aspect during the battle of Gettysburg which could very well have gone differently, with the result that General Lee would have prevailed and the door to our nation's capital appear to be wide open.

Or would it have been? By this time, the series of protective forts planned around D.C. had mostly been completed and we know from Jubal Early's experience in 1864, that they were capable of stopping a corps sized offensive even if relatively lightly manned. On the other hand, presuming Confederate victory at Gettysburg, Lee would have had a much more substantial force albeit fatigued from battle; perhaps exuberance on the southern side from marching on the Union capitol would overcome that fatigue? How quickly could they have rallied to march on D.C. under the circumstance; would there be enough time for Lincoln to dismiss a vanquished Meade and bring Grant east earlier than he did?...And the remnants of the Army of the Potomac whipped up to follow his leadership fresh on the heels of the spectacular and important victory at Vicksburg? Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps... let's see what our debaters assert on January 9th and perhaps the question will be settled forever, amen!!!

I'll see you with Mr. Bearss at our next meeting on December 12th – in the meantime, don't forget to follow us on Facebook and Twitter. Also, check out the articles in this issue on N B Forrest and the Washington Civil War defenses!

Merry Christmas, Happy Chanukah and Happy Holidays to all!

Dan Ursu,

President

Christmas Memories of The Civil War

As we enter the Holiday Season our thoughts turn to many things such as family, parties, dinners with loved ones and of course presents under the tree. But let's for a moment turn our thoughts to what Christmas might have been like during the American Civil War if one was stationed at the front or in some lonely fort in the middle of nowhere. During the 1920s the Plain Dealer did a series called “The Fading Blue Line”. In it they interviewed the many old Civil War Vets living in Cleveland and asked them to tell about their experiences during that conflict. One such interview was taken from the Superintendent of Delivery at the Cleveland Post Office. His name was Salem Hart and he was a drummer boy all those many years ago, and the Christmas party for 16,000 men is the memory that came to him most vividly. The Plain Dealer tells it like this:

“ It was December 23, 1863,” said Mr. Hart “I was a drummer boy in the forty first Ohio Regiment, Gen. William B. Hazen's brigade. Our army corps, the fourth, was hurrying from Missionary Ridge to Clinch Mountain in eastern Tennessee to relieve Burnside who was being besieged by Longstreet. When we arrived

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Christmas memories cont.

Longstreet had gone and we proceeded to spend Christmas in nearly the approved fashion as possible. Some of us saw a rabbit and chased it for about an hour hoping to obtain a good Christmas dinner, we lost the rabbit and dined on hardtack, bacon and coffee, but we lightened up the meal with songs and stories. That was my first Christmas away from home and I shall never forget it.”

Mr. Hart evidently had many fond memories of his service years during the American Civil War. As with all of us the passage of time seemed to filter out all the negative aspects of those years. The biting cold, the friends that didn't make it through the conflict, and the massive destruction of southern cities and farms all were left behind as he came home and started a new life here in Cleveland. He raised a family, took a job with the U.S. Postal Service and purchased a house at 13408 5th Ave. in East Cleveland. While many returning vets then as now had trouble adjusting to post war lives Mr. Hart seemed to move right along. I use the word “seemed” because there is no written record of his life that I know of until he passed away in 1932. By then The Fading Blue Line had almost faded completely away.

As we celebrate Christmas in 2018 the “Blue Line” has totally vanished, but we still have the accounts of those that struggled to keep this nation whole and who celebrated the holidays as best they could during those fateful years. With that we join others in keeping the holiday tradition alive and wishing all a very merry Christmas.

Paul Siedel

In preparation for the January Debate be sure to read

Mark Leepson, "Capital Defense-Washington, D.C. in the Civil War" History Net: <http://www.historynet.com/capital-defense-washington-dc-in-the-civil-war.htm>

U. S. National Park Service. Civil War Defenses of Washington: <https://www.nps.gov/cwdw/index.htm>



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Suggested Reading Dennis Keating

Camp Cleveland

Chris Roy has written a history of Camp Cleveland: “Camp Cleveland: Tremont’s Civil War History”. It appears in the December 2018/January 2019 issue of *Inside Tremont*, the monthly newsletter of the Tremont West Development Corporation: www.tremontwest.org From 1862-1865, 15,000 Union soldiers passed through Camp Cleveland for training, hospitalization, and finally de-mustering. In 2003, an Ohio Historical Marker was dedicated in Tremont near the site of the camp.

Chris previously co-authored a Cleveland Historical entry on Camp Cleveland:

<https://clevelandhistorical.org/items/show/314>

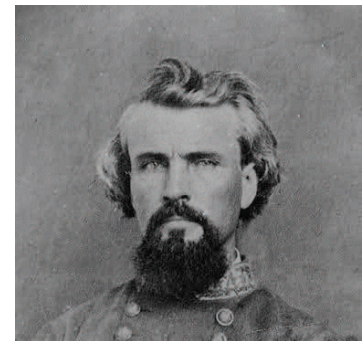
Cleveland Civil War Roundtable Historian Dale Thomas also wrote about it:



Nathan Bedford Forrest: Civil War controversies – then and now

By Dennis Keating

Nathan Bedford Forrest (“the wizard of the saddle”) was one on the most mercurial characters of the Civil War. The killer of numerous Union soldiers and having 29 horses shot out from under him in combat, Forrest was the only soldier on either side to rise from private to Lieutenant General.



A slave holder and trader, Forrest was accused of allowing the slaughter of African American Union soldiers (USCT) at Fort Pillow, Tennessee in April, 1864. After the war, for a time Forrest was the first “Grand Wizard” of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) – which he denied before the U.S. Congress. The Tennessee Legislature established July 13 as “Nathan Bedford Forrest Day”.

Controversy has pursued Forrest to our time.

On April 4, 2018, a new historical marker telling about Forrest’s connection to slavery was unveiled near his home in Memphis, Tennessee. In 1877 (the year of Forrest’s death), the city of Memphis appropriated land for a cemetery to honor the Confederate war dead. In 2000, a monument to honor Forrest was unveiled there. In 2012, the statue’s bust of Forrest went missing. A new statue was dedicated in 2015. In 2017, a statue of Forrest was removed from a Memphis city park (renamed in 2013 from Forrest Park) after protests about Forrest’s connections to the slave trade and the KKK. The city sold the park to Memphis Greenspace in 2016 after it was denied the right to remove the Forrest statue by the state Historical Commission under Tennessee law.

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Nathan Bedford Forrest cont.

Forrest's last battle was his failed attempt to prevent the capture of Selma, Alabama by James Wilson's cavalry raid in 1865. In Forrest's honor, a bust of him was placed in the city's monument to the Confederate Civil War dead in Live Oak Cemetery. In 2001, demonstrators protested the Forrest memorial and attempted to remove the bust. Subsequently, the bust was stolen but later replaced. So, decades after his death controversies over Forrest have continued in an era of protests over memorials in public places to the Confederacy and its heroes. .

September 2019 Field Trip

Visit the land of Lincoln – Springfield, Illinois

September 19 – 21, 2019



The annual Cleveland Civil War Round Table Field Trip is set for September 19 – 21, 2019 in historic Springfield, Illinois. The trip will include a visit to the Abraham Lincoln Museum and Library - one of the most visited presidential libraries - which combines history with modern age technology. Our group will be hosted for lunch on the premises with a speaker from the Museum. The itinerary will include a visit to President Lincoln's home and tomb and the State Capital Building, where he served. Springfield is also the home of the Illinois State Military Museum, which includes artifacts from all of America's conflicts with many Civil War items and the Grand Army of the Republic Civil War Museum. For those wanting a unique experience, there will be an opportunity to go on a Lincoln's Ghost Walking Tour on Friday evening. Our group will be welcomed to Springfield Thursday evening by none other than Ward Hill Lamon, Lincoln's long-time friend and body guard (portrayed by local historian and guide Garrett Moffett) and the President (portrayed by a local Lincoln impersonator) will join us for dinner Saturday evening at our hotel.

Please mark your calendars to that you can experience this unique opportunity to experience the Land of Lincoln!

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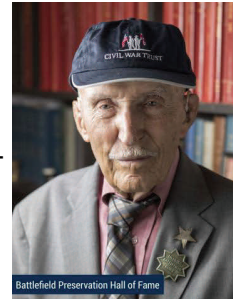
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Profile: Ed Bearss

by Dennis Keating

Ed Bearss was born on June 26, 1923 in Billings, Montana. His interest in the Civil War came early. Severely wounded in the Pacific in World War II, Ed became an historian at the Vicksburg National Park. He led interpretative tours of this battlefield. Among his many publications are several on the Vicksburg campaign. His M.A. in History thesis at Indiana University was on Confederate General Patrick Cleburne.



In 1966, Bearss was transferred to Washington, D.C. and in 1981 he was named Chief Historian of the National Park Service (NPS). After his retirement in 1995, he was named Chief NPS Historian Emeritus.

Ed is the recipient of numerous awards. These include:

Bruce Catton Award, Bell I. Wiley Award, T. Harry Williams Award, Harry S. Truman Award for Meritorious Service in the field of Civil War History, Department of the Interior Distinguished Service Award, Pritzker Military Founder's Literature Award (2017), American Battlefield Trust inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award (2018).

On July 13 Ed threw out the ceremonial first ball at the first-ever championship game of the All-Star Armed Services Classic.

Aged 95, Ed continues to participate in battlefield tours. In March 2019, Ed will accompany tours of the Atlanta campaign and the Vicksburg campaign. In May, 2019, Ed will participate in the 6th Annual National Ed Bearss Symposium on Military Leadership & Combat.

Ed Bearss first spoke to the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable in 1962 and is a lifetime honorary member.



History Brief *It's a Wonderful Connection* by Dave Carrino

When the calendar moves to December, among the things we can count on are cold weather, very many holiday sales, and far too little time to prepare for the holidays. There are also sure to be plenty of opportunities to overdose on television broadcasts of holiday movies. These holiday movies include musicals such as *Holiday Inn* and *White Christmas*, animated films such as *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and *Frosty the Snowman*, and the stop motion film *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. There are several versions of *A Christmas Carol*, including one with the Disney characters and another with the Muppets. (Who needs Alastair Sim and George C. Scott when we have Mickey Mouse and Kermit the Frog?) There are comedies such as *Elf*, *Home Alone*, and *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, and there are sentimental movies such as *Miracle on 34th Street* and *The Polar Express*. There is also the movie *A Christmas Story*, which is both humorous and sentimental and is set in a house that, in real life, is in Cleveland. Of all the holiday movies, the one that is arguably the most inspirational and uplifting is *It's a Wonderful Life*, because this movie's story conveys the message that every person is valuable, even those whose lives seem ordinary and humdrum.

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conveys the message that every person is valuable, even those whose lives seem ordinary and humdrum. But one little-known aspect of this movie is that it has a definite connection to the Civil War. One connection between *It's a Wonderful Life* and the Civil War is that Jimmy Stewart, who had the male lead in *It's a Wonderful Life*, also had the leading role in a 1965 movie named *Shenandoah*, a fictitious story about a Virginia family during the Civil War. But that movie is maudlin and insipid, and there is a connection between *It's a Wonderful Life* and the Civil War which is much more substantive than that.

The story for *It's a Wonderful Life* was written by a man named Philip Van Doren Stern. Stern was born on September 10, 1900 in Wyalusing, a small town in northeastern Pennsylvania. Stern grew up in New Jersey, graduated from Rutgers University, and spent most of his adult life in New York City. He worked as a publishing editor, and during World War II he was general manager of a program that printed paperback editions of books that were small enough to fit in the uniform pockets of U.S. servicemen. Stern spent the last eight years of his life in Florida and died on July 31, 1984 at the age of 83. On the morning of February 12, 1938, while he was shaving, Stern had the idea for the story that became *It's a Wonderful Life*. Although the idea for the story came to Stern like a bolt from the blue, laying out the entire story on paper became an excruciating endeavor. It was five years of writing and rewriting before Stern had a finished version of the story, which he named *The Greatest Gift* and which centers on a main character named George Pratt. Despite great effort, Stern could not find a publisher willing to take on the story, and in December 1943, Stern, at his own expense, had his 4,000-word story printed as a booklet, which he sent to 200 of his family and friends as a holiday card. In fact, Stern's only child, Marguerite Stern Robinson, hand-delivered some of those cards when she was in the third grade. Somehow one of those cards made its way to a movie producer at RKO Studios named David Hempstead, who was intrigued enough to consider the story for a movie. But after more than a year and three scripts that were deemed inadequate, RKO unloaded the rights to the story to a small, independent film company that had recently been formed by a man named Frank Capra. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Capra brought in some other writers to work on the screenplay, and these writers successfully adapted the story, which was renamed *It's a Wonderful Life*. The movie opened in December 1946 and received mixed reviews. It also received six Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture, Best Actor, and Best Director, but won only one, the Technical Achievement Award, which was conferred because of a method for simulating falling snow that was developed for the movie. The movie's popularity following its release was disappointing. Ironically, *It's a Wonderful Life* did not reach the lofty status it now holds until its copyright was not renewed in 1974. This allowed television stations and networks to broadcast the movie without paying royalties, and in subsequent years the movie was broadcast numerous times during the holiday season, sometimes at the same time on different television channels. The immense viewership that resulted led to an enormous increase in popularity as people became enthralled with the movie's story and message. In 1993, through some legal maneuvering, the copyright again became enforceable, and now the movie is broadcast on a much more limited basis.

As is generally true for movie classics, there is a large amount of interesting trivia associated with *It's a Wonderful Life*. For example, when the rights to the story were held by RKO Studios, the actor who was being considered for the role of George Bailey was Cary Grant. Also, in the scene in which George and Mary make wishes by throwing stones through the windows of an abandoned house, Frank Capra had someone ready to break the window on cue when Mary threw her stone. But Donna Reed hit the window and shattered the glass with her throw, and on her first try. Reed actually had an accurate throwing arm due to years of playing baseball in her youth. Reed's accurate throw was an unexpected moment during the filming. Also unexpected, at least for Lionel Barrymore, was losing a \$50 bet with Donna Reed that she could milk a cow.

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Reed grew up on a farm in Iowa, where she learned how to milk cows, and when she mentioned to Barrymore that she could do it, he challenged her, and she proved herself with a cow that was on set. Barrymore would not have lost such a bet, if another actress who was considered for the role of Mary had not turned it down. The actress who turned down the role of Mary was Ginger Rogers, because she considered the character too bland. One person who did not turn down a role in the movie deserved a bonus for hazardous duty, and that was Robert Anderson (not the commander of Fort Sumter, but the actor who played young George Bailey). According to Anderson, in the scene in which Mr. Gower slapped George, the slaps were so hard that blood actually came out of Anderson's ear. After the scene was filmed, H.B. Warner, the actor who played Mr. Gower, comforted Anderson. Warner played a much more non-violent character in the 1927 silent film *The King of Kings*, which was directed by renowned director Cecil B. DeMille. In that film, Warner played Jesus Christ.

Seneca Falls, New York considers itself the inspiration for Bedford Falls. But Philip Van Doren Stern, who grew up in New Jersey, said in an interview that the town he had in mind for his story is Califon, New Jersey, which has an iron bridge over a river, similar to the bridge in the movie from which George Bailey planned to jump. Similarly, the Sesame Street characters Bert and Ernie are thought to be namesakes of the movie's characters Bert the cop and Ernie the taxi driver. But Jim Henson's writing partner, Jerry Juhl, claimed this is not so. Karolyn Grimes, the actress who played Zuzu, said that she never saw the movie until 1979, more than 30 years after it was made. Grimes may have waited decades before watching the movie, but anyone who watches the beginning of *It's a Wonderful Life* hears a cryptic reference to Philip Van Doren Stern's original story that became the basis for the movie. In the opening lines of the movie, when the assignment to rescue George Bailey is being explained to Clarence, Clarence is told that George intends to throw away "God's greatest gift." Later in the movie, when Clarence explains to George that he has been given "a chance to see what the world would be like without you," Clarence calls that opportunity "a great gift."

One perhaps surprising piece of trivia about *It's a Wonderful Life* is that it came under scrutiny by the FBI and the House Un-American Activities Committee. A 1947 FBI memo noted that two of the writers who worked on *It's a Wonderful Life* were "very close to known Communists and on one occasion in the recent past...practically lived with known Communists." The memo further noted that a witness, whose name was redacted, "stated in substance that the film represented a rather obvious attempt to discredit bankers by casting Lionel Barrymore as a 'scrooge-type' so that he would be the most hated man in the picture. This, according to these sources, is a common trick used by Communists." In other testimony, "[redacted] stated that, in his opinion, this picture deliberately maligned the upper class, attempting to show the people who had money were mean and despicable characters."

After all of the foregoing information about *It's a Wonderful Life*, anyone reading this is probably wondering when the connection between the movie and the Civil War is going to be explained. The connection between the movie *It's a Wonderful Life* and the Civil War is this. Philip Van Doren Stern, the person who wrote the story that was used for *It's a Wonderful Life*, wrote an impressive number of non-fiction books about the Civil War. Among Stern's Civil War books are *Prologue to Sumter: The Beginnings of the Civil War from the John Brown Raid to the Surrender of Fort Sumter*, *When the Guns Roared: World Aspects of the American Civil War*, *An End to Valor: The Last Days of the Civil War*, *Soldier Life in the Union and Confederate Armies*, *They Were There: The Civil War in Action as Seen by its Combat Artists*, *The Confederate Navy: A Pictorial History*, *Secret Missions of the Civil War*, *The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, *Robert E. Lee: The Man and the Soldier*, and *The Man Who Killed Lincoln: The Story of John Wilkes Booth and his Part in the Assassination*. Stern also wrote a novel about the Civil War titled *The Drums of Morning*. In its review of Stern's Civil War novel, *The New York Herald Tribune* called it "the long overdue fictional answer to *Gone with the Wind*."

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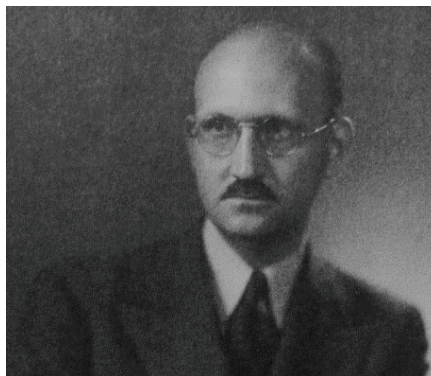
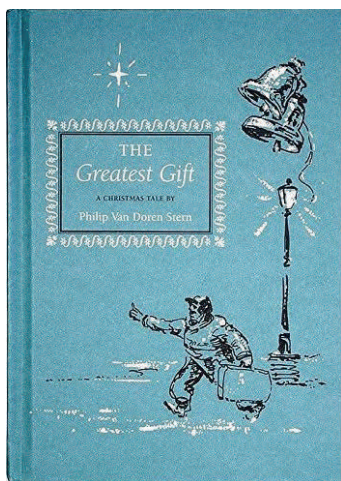
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In contrast to *Gone with the Wind*, which romanticizes Georgia slaveholders, *The Drums of Morning* focuses on abolitionists in New England and Illinois. Philip Van Doren Stern was such an accomplished and acclaimed writer of Civil War history that the headline of his obituary in *The New York Times* does not mention his contribution to *It's a Wonderful Life*, but calls Stern "A Specialist on Civil War Era." The text of Stern's obituary notes that he was "widely respected by scholars for his authoritative books on the Civil War era." Although Stern's most widely viewed piece of work is the story that became *It's a Wonderful Life*, the work for which Stern was most highly acknowledged were his books about Civil War history.

There is a memorable scene in *It's a Wonderful Life* when George Bailey is beginning to come to the astounding realization that his world has been shockingly altered. George learned that the town in which he lived has come to be dominated by the greedy, heartless man whose devious, vicious schemes George had successfully thwarted. George watched as the pharmacist, Mr. Gower, was ridiculed by a large group of people, because Mr. Gower had made a mistake with a prescription that led to the death of a young boy, even though George remembered that he had made Mr. Gower aware of the error, and Mr. Gower had corrected it. George was told that his family's company, for which he sacrificed all his dreams to keep afloat, had gone out of business. George's own mother coldly expressed to him that she had no idea who he was, and she even referred to George as a stranger. George went to the house where he lived with his wife and children, but that house was uninhabited and dilapidated, and he was told that his children, Tommy, Pete, Janie, and Zuzu, had never come into existence. After experiencing all this, George stared wide-eyed in frightened astonishment at the gruesomely distorted world in which he now found himself, and the angel, Clarence, said to George, "Each man's life touches so many other lives." The implicit message in Clarence's statement is that there often are obscure connections in unexpected places. The movie *It's a Wonderful Life* has such a connection. From now on, when you watch that movie, you will know that it has a little-known connection to the Civil War. As thoughtful as it might be to point out this connection to other viewers of the movie, even if you do this, you will probably not receive your angel wings. But if you do make people aware of this connection, then, when it comes to your wealth of knowledge about the Civil War, you may very well be toasted as the richest person in town.



Author Philip Van Doren Stern



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JOIN US FOR OUR NEXT MEETING

Dec. 12, 2018

Program: Nathan Bedford Forrest Speaker: Ed Bearss

Drinks @ 6 pm, Dinner @ 6:40

Judson Manor , East 108th St. & Chester



A Christmas dinner. A scene on the outer picket line.

Library of Congress

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