

The CHARGER



Cleveland Civil War Roundtable

Dec. 2020

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PRESIDENT'S DECEMBER MESSAGE

I hope everyone had a safe and happy Thanksgiving holiday. With the holiday season in full swing, I also hope you won't forget the Round Table meeting on Wednesday, December 9. As usual, we will try and get started at 7:00 pm with our speaker's presentation to follow at around 7:10 or so. We will be sending invites via email on December 7 for the Zoom presentation. Speaking of the presentation, here is some information on what to expect.

When we think of a single regiment at Gettysburg, the 20th Maine and Joshua Chamberlain probably jump into our minds first. But as those of us with a more than passing knowledge of the Civil War know, there were many regiments and their leaders who played instrumental roles in helping the Army of the Potomac prevail in those climatic three days. Picket's Charge, or more properly Longstreet's Assault or the Picket-Pettigrew-Trimble attack has a special place in American folk lore and history. It was defeated by the combined efforts of several regiments and their combat leaders. Our very own 8th Ohio will be the subject of our December meeting and the part it played in defeating the Confederate assault on July 3, 1863.

Kelly Boyer Sagert will present "Wells Waite Miller and the 8th OVI." Wells Waite Miller from Castalia, Ohio played a key role in the 8th OVI's heroic contributions at Gettysburg. He was so badly wounded that he expected galloping horses to finish him off, but he went on to play an important role in Ohio's agricultural history and more.

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Kelly Boyer Sagert is a fulltime freelance writer living in Lorain, Ohio. She writes frequently on historical topics, including the Underground Railroad and Civil War. She is part of an Emmy-Award-nominated team for the 2016 Best Historical Documentary, where she received full writing credits. She has published fourteen books, several of them historical in nature, and has been commissioned to write five historical plays. Ms. Boyer Sagert is a member of the American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA) and the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR)

Dick Crews Debate – January 13, 2021 – HOLLYWOOD GOES TO WAR

[THE CIVIL ONE]

Our topic this year is  "Hollywood Goes to War [the Civil One]." The question is, "What movie or TV production has had the greatest impact on how we view the events surrounding the Civil War?" William Vodrey will again be our moderator. Debaters will be able to pick their own movie or TV production (first come, first served), and should expect to speak for five minutes, then take questions from the membership for another five, and finally to take part in a general discussion/rebuttal opportunity with the other debaters. It's a lot of fun, and no particular expertise is either required or expected; younger and newer members of the Roundtable are warmly encouraged to take part. The debate winner, chosen by vote of the membership, will receive fabulous prizes. If you'd like to be one of our debaters, please let William know (being sure to name the movie or TV production you'd like to speak about) by noon on Thurs. Dec. 10 at clecwr@gmail.com.



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SPRING FIELD TRIP

We rescheduled the Fall Field Trip to the spring of 2021 so it will be our first spring field trip! We still have a dozen members signed up to visit Petersburg April 29-May 2, 2021. I have confirmed with our guide and Pamplin Park that we are “a go” for those dates. The hotel will not reconfirm until after January 1. I will update and reconfirm all arrangements in early January. We will start taking new reservations after the first of the year.

ZOOM MEETINGS

We will continue to conduct our meetings by Zoom. With the help of Lily Korte and Andrew Mangels, we had a pretty smooth session with General Grant in November. We are also working on presenting videos of our October and November sessions for those of you who missed them. We have permission from both speakers to post the videos and are working on the details. We will keep you informed of our progress.

Have a Happy and Safe Holiday season!
Steve Pettyjohn

The Top 10 Civil War Movies

According to Martin Kelly, ThoughtCo. (June 23, 2019): <https://www.thoughtco.com/top-six-civil-war-movies-104547>:

Glory
Gettysburg
Gone with the Wind
North and South
The Red Badge of Courage
Shenandoah
Cold Mountain
Lincoln
The Civil War
Gods and Generals



Submitted by Dennis Keating

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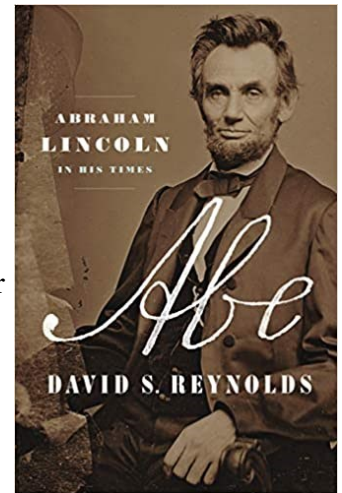
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Book Review David Reynolds “Abraham Lincoln in His Times” Robert Walcott

Abraham Lincoln in His Times is a magisterial work. It clocks in at over 900 pages and is written by an academic, but do not let this discourage you. It is a terrific book, the best Lincoln biography since Pulitzer Prize winner David Herbert Donald published his biography of Lincoln twenty-five years ago. What sets Reynolds's book apart is his integration of Lincoln's life into the 19th century context in which he lived. We all know Lincoln grew up in what was then called the West, Kentucky and Indiana. What you may not know is that Lincoln was admired as an excellent wrestler in his youth and would occasionally come across an acquaintance with one eye gouged out in a fight, a not uncommon occurrence. This book is a page-turner. Highly recommended.



The 8th Ohio Volunteer Infantry

by Dennis Keating

The 8th Ohio OVI was formed in the Spring of 1861. Its companies were from Northern Ohio. Company B from Cleveland was known as the "Hibernian Guards" (a cumulative total of 101 served with 45 casualties). The regiment enlisted on July 24, 1861 for three years. Joined with the 4th Ohio, the 14th Indiana, and the 7th West Virginia regiments, the unit became known at the "Gibraltar" brigade (after the battle of Antietam).

In addition to its heroic role at the battle of Gettysburg, its war record included:

- It first participated in George McClellan's campaign in West Virginia;
- It fought against Stonewall Jackson at the first battle of Kernstown in the Shenandoah Valley on March 23, 1862;
- It then joined the Army of the Potomac and its II Corps and participated in the Peninsula Campaign;
- At Antietam, it fought Hill's force in the "Bloody Lane" and is remembered by a monument on the battlefield;
- It participated in the battles of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville (but only in minor roles);
- It fought throughout Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign, including at the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and Cold Harbor;
- On June 24, 1864 at Petersburg , it was withdrawn and returned to Cleveland on July 3, where it was mustered out on July 13, 1864 with 168 present. Overall, its cumulative overall strength was 45 officers and 944 enlisted men. It suffered 132 combat deaths and 73 from disease for a total of 205 fatalities. Three of its soldiers won the Medal of Honor (two at Gettysburg and the other at Spotsylvania).

References

My 2012 article, Cleveland Civil War Roundtable Archives

Encyclopedia of Cleveland History: <https://case.edu/ech/articles/e/8th-ohio-volunteer-infantry-regiment>

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What are the “Saltpeter Poems”?

Brian Kowell

In last month's "Charger, David Carrino's article "What do the Masters Golf Tournament and Confederate Gunpowder have in Common?" I thought it was very interesting about the Confederate Bureau of Nitre and Mining's attempts to manufacture gunpowder. It reminded me of a poem about one of the agents of the Nitre and Mining Bureau composed during the Civil war and I found some interesting material online about it. The contents below are taken from Steve Davis' article posted April 26, 2012 on the Emerging Civil war website.

"Students and devotees of the great Emory Professor Bell I. Wiley are very familiar with "The Bell Irwin Wiley Reader" edited by Hill Jordan, James I. Robertson and J.H. Segars. (LSU Press, 2001)

Researching the book, Mr. Jordan spent several weeks perusing the 176 boxes of personal papers that Dr. Wiley bequeathed to Emory University Library. He found quite a lot of interesting material, including research notes used by Wiley in his memorable "Life of Johnny Reb" (1943) and "Life of Billy Yank" (1952).

The example is the Alabama newspaper announcement that a Confederate agent of the Confederate Nitre and Mining Bureau was seeking out an ingredient used in the production of nitre: human urine. In "Johnny Reb" (pp 305) Wiley writes that the agent, Jonathan Haralson (or Harralson)advertised in a Selma, Alabama newspaper " requesting the women of the town to save all the 'chamber-lye' accumulated around their premises so that it might be collected in barrels sent around by the Bureau."

The advertisement sparked a lot of off-color quips and some vulgar doggerel. Wiley had seen copies of poetry printed as a funny broadside, some of which had been distributed to the Confederate soldiers in the trenches at Petersburg, but noted, "Unfortunately the content is not of a publishable character." The local wag named Thomas B. Wetmore, provost marshal of Selma, was the author of the naughty Southern verses chiding Haralson."

Mr. Jordan, a resident of Saute, Georgia, printed out two different versions of these "Saltpeter Poems" - one Southern by Wetmore and, not to be out-done , a northern version by an unknown author. These were shared with Mr. Steve Davis where I found them on the Emerging Civil war site.

Go to the next page to see how a young lady's “nitre” helped fight the Civil War.

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The Southern Version

John Harralson, John Harralson
You are a wretched creature;
You've added to this cruel war
A new and useful feature.

You'd have us think, while every man
Is bound to be a fighter
The Ladies - bless the pretty dears -
Should save their pee for nitre.

John Harralson, John Harralson
Where did you get the notion
To send your barrel around the town
To gather up the lotion?

We thought the girls had work enough
In making shirts and kissing
But you have put the pretty dears
To patriotic pissing.

John Harralson, John Harralson
Do pray invent a neater
And somewhat immodest way
Of making your saltpeter.

For 'tis an awful idea, John
Gunpowdery and cranky
That when a lady lifts her skirts
She's killing off a Yankee.

A Yankee Version

John Harralson, John Harralson
We've read in song and story
How women's tears, in all the years
Have moistened fields of glory.

But never was it told before,
How 'mid such scenes of slaughter,
Your Southern beauties dried their tears
And went to making water.

No wonder that your boys were brave!
Who couldn't be a fighter?
If every time he fired his gun
He used his sweetheart's nitre.

And visa-versa, what could make
A Yankee soldier sadder
Than dodging bullets fired by
A pretty woman's bladder.

They say there was a subtle smell
Which lingered in the powder
And as the smoke grew thicker and
The din of battle louder.

That there was found in this compound
One serious objection.
No soldier boy could sniff it
Without having an erection.

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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." The PD 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 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 2020 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

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Advocating for the Villain to Avoid Oblivion: A Response to the Presentation at the October 2020 Cleveland Civil War Roundtable Meeting

by David A. Carrino

Introduction

The October 2020 Cleveland Civil War Roundtable meeting featured an excellent presentation by Codie Eash titled "'Pray for Oblivion to His Memory': Frederick Douglass on the Legacy of Robert E. Lee." In his presentation, Mr. Eash beautifully explained the case that Frederick Douglass laid out against preserving the memory of Robert E. Lee, that is, the case against honoring Lee in any way. If I understand Mr. Eash's presentation correctly, Douglass' case against Lee was intended as a microcosm of his case against the Confederacy in general, and Douglass directed his invective at Lee simply to use Lee as a symbol for the Confederacy. Douglass chose to make Lee the target of his criticism for a few reasons. First, after the Civil War, Lee was viewed in the former Confederacy as someone who, during the war, had been a noble and highly effective champion for advancing the Confederacy's cause to victory. As such, Lee, in the minds of ex-Confederates, symbolized what once had been the vanquished Confederacy's best chance for success, and in their view Lee possessed, more than any other person within the ranks of the Confederacy, the most exemplary character. As Mr. Eash also discussed, another important factor in Douglass choosing Lee to be the target of his attacks was the timing of Lee's death. Lee died in 1870, and his death briefly thrust Lee into national attention. Lee, by his own choice, spent most of his post-Civil War life largely out of the nation's view as the president of a struggling college in a remote location in Virginia. Even before his death, Lee was already becoming an icon in the South, and his death enhanced Lee's status as a Confederate icon. This made an attack on Lee a logical choice as a way to attack the Confederacy. In addition, the timing of Lee's death was opportune for assailing the Confederacy, because Lee's death occurred soon enough after the Civil War that the personal losses caused by the war were still fresh in everyone's mind, and the memory of what the Confederacy had attempted to do (i.e., secede) and why it wanted to do it was still firmly fixed in the nation's consciousness. It was in this environment that Douglass sought to make certain that the country never forgot the lessons that were learned from the terrible past of legalized slavery and a bloody war initiated by those who fought to preserve that institution. The preceding summary of Douglass' case is as I understand it from Mr. Eash's presentation, and I hope that I have articulated it correctly.

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It is clear from Douglass' speeches and writings that he harbored hatred and anguish toward America, a country which was supposedly founded on the principle that "all men are created equal," but which permitted an entire race of people to be enslaved. In a speech that Douglass delivered prior to the Civil War, Douglass decried the celebration of a day designated Independence Day, which commemorated the establishment of independence in America, but which to Douglass bore the bitter irony of not extending that freedom to a large portion of America's people. As Douglass said in that speech, "Standing, there, identified with the American bondman, making his wrongs mine, I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this 4th of July! Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future." Douglass' words were tragically prescient, because America remained false to its founding principle not just in the aftermath of a horrible war fought in part to put an end to that falsehood, but even until the present. To Douglass, the failure of America to live up to its founding principle in the future would mean that the Civil War "so heroically fought and so victoriously ended shall pass into history a miserable failure, barren of permanent results, – a scandalous and shocking waste of blood and treasure." Douglass saw that one way this could happen is if the cause of the Confederacy were allowed to endure, and Douglass saw a movement developing among former Confederates to perpetuate their cause in the icon of Robert E. Lee, who was being elevated by former Confederates to be the post-war embodiment of the rightness of their cause. Because of this, Douglass attacked the cause of the Confederacy by attacking Lee, as Mr. Eash discussed in his presentation.

Prior to the October meeting, Roundtable president Steve Pettyjohn contacted me about writing something as a follow-up to Mr. Eash's presentation. Steve thought that, because of recent events related to Confederate monuments, Mr. Eash's presentation, which centered on a campaign by Frederick Douglass to eradicate the memory of Robert E. Lee, could be seen as controversial. I suppose that Steve contacted me because he knows, as do many members of the Roundtable, that I am an admirer of Lee. This is not to say that I feel Lee is immune from criticism. For example, it has always been my opinion that Lee was wrong in siding with the Confederacy. That said, there is still much about Lee that I admire, and this is probably why Steve approached me about preparing a follow-up to Mr. Eash's presentation. In thinking about the presentation, specifically with regard to Douglass' targeting of Lee as the focus of his attack on the Confederacy, three questions come to mind. First, [was targeting Lee a good strategy for Douglass in his attack on the Confederacy?](#) Second, did Lee deserve the harsh criticism that Douglass directed at him? Last, did Lee deserve Douglass' harsh criticism more than any other person associated with the Confederacy? In other words, did Lee, more than any other former Confederate, deserve to be the primary target of Douglass' criticism, that is, did Lee deserve to be singled out for Douglass' criticism?

1. Was targeting Lee a good strategy for Douglass in his attack on the Confederacy?

Regarding the first question of targeting Lee as good strategy, this seems to me to be a

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good decision by Douglass in his attack on the Confederacy. As discussed above, soon after the war Lee was elevated by former Confederates to a uniquely heroic position among the leading figures of the Confederacy. Lee was becoming, at least in the minds of former Confederates, the greatest icon of their attempt at establishing a separate nation, because to them he had brought them closest to victory, and in defeat he represented the noblest person who had fought for their cause. One series of events is a clear indication of the reverence with which Lee was held in the former Confederacy. In the spring of 1870, several months before Lee's death in October of that year, while Lee was the president of Washington College, the faculty of the college convinced Lee to take a lengthy trip south, because his health had suffered during the previous winter. The hope was that the warmer weather would improve Lee's health, and the absence from his many duties as president of the college would give Lee an opportunity for rest. Lee was accompanied on the trip by his daughter, Agnes, and anecdotes in Agnes' letters to her mother reveal the depth of feeling toward Lee that was felt by people who came to see the former Confederate general at each of the stops on his trip. "I wish you could travel with papa to see the affection and feeling shown toward him everywhere." "At Raleigh and another place the people crowded to the depot and called 'Lee! Lee!' and cheered vociferously." "Crowds came. Wounded soldiers, servants, and working-men even." The most amazing reception that Lee received occurred at Jacksonville, Florida, where a large crowd had gathered to welcome Lee. When the crowd saw Lee, he and the crowd stood silently facing each other, and the men, rather than cheering, simply removed their hats in a wave that moved through the crowd, as if that silent gesture had been prearranged. A newspaper in Jacksonville reported, "The very silence of the multitude spoke a deeper feeling than the loudest huzzas could have expressed." The reception that Lee received at each stop of his trip shows the esteem in which Lee was held in the South.

When Lee died several months after this trip, his passing only elevated him to a higher level of reverence within the former Confederacy. As such, Lee could rightly be viewed as the most venerated icon of the Confederacy, which, for anyone who wanted to assail the Confederacy, made Lee an ideal target as a symbol of the rebellion. Because of this, it was good strategy for Douglass to aim his attack at Lee. After his death, an attack at Lee, as the once living and now iconic symbol of the Confederacy, would be more effective than an attack on the abstract Confederate States of America, particularly since former Confederates had already elevated Lee to lofty status and now, in the wake of his death, were sure to use him as the symbol of the correctness of their cause. For Douglass, it made perfect sense to "pray for oblivion to his memory," because before his death Lee was seen in the South as living proof of the gallantry of the Confederacy's struggle, and his memory was going to be used to validate the righteousness of the Confederate cause. Hence, making Lee the target of his criticism was good strategy for Douglass.

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2. Did Lee deserve the harsh criticism that Douglass directed at him?

With respect to the second question of whether or not Lee was deserving of Douglass' criticism, it is my opinion that Lee did deserve this. As mentioned above, in spite of my admiration for Lee, he does, in my opinion, deserve criticism, in particular, as regards Douglass' case against him, for siding with the Confederacy. Some assert that Lee made this decision not because he, himself, agreed with secession, but only because Virginia, Lee's native state, agreed with secession. But whether or not this is so, Lee was, in my opinion, unquestionably wrong and misguided in siding with the Confederacy. In fact, a case can be made that if Lee was not staunchly in agreement with secession, and Lee sided with the forces fighting for secession only because Virginia seceded, then Lee deserves not just criticism, but the harsh criticism that Douglass directed at him. As it happens, there is evidence that Lee was not a staunch supporter of secession, such as the comment he reputedly made when secession fever was rising in Virginia, "I must say that I am one of those dull creatures that cannot see the good of secession." Also, in a letter to one of his sons in December 1860, Lee wrote, "I prize the Union very highly & know of no personal sacrifice that I would not make to preserve it, save that of honour." If it is true that Lee was not a strong proponent of secession, and if he allowed Virginia to make his decision for him, a decision with which he was not in agreement, then he most certainly deserves harsh criticism for joining a cause that he, himself, admitted he "cannot see the good of" and, moreover, for joining that cause based solely on the direction that Virginia decided on. In other words, Lee not only forsook his country at its hour of greatest need, he allowed Virginia to make that decision for him.

Ironically, Lee's eldest son, Custis, graduated from West Point 25 years after his father in a class that had as its motto "When Our Country Calls." But Custis, whose class graduated during the time that Lee was the superintendent of West Point, fought for the Confederacy, as did his father and both of his brothers. In other words, when the country called, Lee and all three of his sons ignored that call. In addition, by siding with the cause of secession, Lee was also siding with the cause of slavery. Siding with the cause of secession is sufficient reason to subject Lee to harsh criticism, and siding with a cause that was fighting both for secession and for the preservation of slavery substantially increases the justification for directing scathing criticism at Lee. As such, in my opinion, there is justification for Douglass to criticize Lee. However, this leads to the third of the three questions posed above.

3a. Did Lee deserve Douglass' harsh criticism more than any other person associated with the Confederacy? — Lee, the icon of the Confederacy

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The third question is whether or not Lee deserved Douglass' harsh criticism more than any other person associated with the Confederacy. Of the three questions, this one is the most complex and nuanced. As discussed above, Douglass chose to target Lee in part because Lee had come to be a Confederate icon due to his military prowess and accomplishments in support of the Confederacy's cause. But was it fair for Douglass to target Lee simply because Lee was a more skilled military leader than his comrades, such as Braxton Bragg or John C. Pemberton? Lee certainly made some mistakes in his tactical decisions, such as Pickett's Charge and the assault up Malvern Hill. But a strong argument can be made that Lee's military skill allowed the Confederacy to hold off far superior numbers in the East for much longer than other Confederate army commanders would have, certainly longer than Joseph E. Johnston was doing. In light of the military results in the West, which ran almost continuously against the Confederacy from the start of the war, it is not a stretch to say that without Lee, the Civil War may have ended in Confederate defeat in half the time that the war actually lasted. But was Lee any more guilty of fighting in support of the Confederacy than were Bragg or Pemberton or Johnston simply because Lee did a better job of it? In other words, was Lee, relative to other Confederate military leaders, more deserving of Douglass' harsh criticism just because he was a more effective military leader? Was Lee, relative to other Confederate leaders, more deserving of Douglass' harsh criticism just because he, not by his choice and simply due to his effectiveness as a military leader, was elevated by other former Confederates to be an icon of the Confederacy? It should be kept in mind that Lee did not ask to be made the icon of the Confederacy, nor did he apply for the position or campaign for it. Southerners simply made Lee the Confederacy's icon because of Lee's Civil War accomplishments and because of the admirable character they saw in Lee, and much of the movement to make Lee the Confederacy's icon occurred after Lee's death when he could do nothing about it. As such, a case can be made that it was unfair to single Lee out for harsh criticism.

In addition, as discussed above, Lee's military skill probably did prolong the war and thereby increase the bloodshed, but when it was clear to Lee near the end of the war that the Confederacy would be defeated, he sought to bring the hostilities and the bloodshed to an earlier end. One way that he did this was to summarily reject a last-ditch suggestion made to him by E.P. Alexander, James Longstreet's chief of artillery. At some point when the Army of Northern Virginia was trapped at Appomattox Court House, Alexander suggested to Lee that the men be allowed to "scatter like rabbits & partridges in the woods." Although Alexander later denied the obvious intent of his suggestion, it was clear to Lee that Alexander was proposing that the war in the East be continued by guerilla warfare. Lee rejected this suggestion, because, in his mind, "The country would be full of lawless bands in every part, & a state of society would ensue from which it would take the country years to recover." By rejecting the proposal that Confederate forces in the East continue hostilities by guerilla warfare, Lee was demonstrating sound judgment by attempting to end the bloodshed as soon as possible once

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he realized that all hope of Confederate victory was lost. This contrasts with other Confederate leaders, especially Jefferson Davis, who was willing to carry on the fight with its consequent additional bloodshed even in the face of certain defeat. Because of his sound judgement in this situation, Lee deserves at least some vindication relative to other Confederate leaders.

3b. Did Lee deserve Douglass' harsh criticism more than any other person associated with the Confederacy? — Lee and reconciliation with the North

Moreover, after the war Lee worked perhaps more than any other former Confederate to reconcile the two sections of the previously fractured country. It may be that Lee recognized that his prominence among former Confederates meant that many of them would follow his example, and that if he set an example of reconciliation, then reconciliation would come about. One especially strong reconciliatory example that Lee set was to apply for restoration of his U.S. citizenship by submitting a signed oath of allegiance to the country he had served with distinction prior to his turning away to serve the interests of his native state. Several months after the surrender at Appomattox, Lee sent his signed oath to the Federal government. Ironically, the Federal government did not restore Lee's citizenship until 110 years later, because Lee's oath went missing. It is not clear what happened to Lee's oath of allegiance. Maybe it was accidentally misplaced or filed in an unexpected place. Perhaps there was nothing nefarious involved with the missing oath, but the fact is Lee's oath went missing until 1970 when it was found in the National Archives. By an act of Congress passed on July 22, 1975 and signed by Gerald Ford on August 5, 1975, Lee regained the citizenship that he had applied for so long past as part of his attempt to set a proper reconciliatory example to his former Confederate compatriots.

There were other things that Lee did to foster reconciliation, things that were on a less official level than submitting his oath of allegiance to the U.S. For example, in the summer of 1869, Lee and his family spent time at a place called White Sulphur Springs, a resort in West Virginia at which the Lee family often vacationed prior to and after the Civil War. During this 1869 trip, there were a number of Northerners at the resort, and they were ostracized by the Southern vacationers. In the ballroom one evening, Lee saw a group of Northerners by themselves. Lee asked some young Southerners, in particular a young woman named Christina Bond, to accompany him to greet the Northerners. Then, as Christina recalled, he told her, "I want you to take a message to your young friends." Lee continued, "Tell them from me that it is unworthy of them as women, and especially as Christian women, to cherish feelings of resentment against the North. Tell them that it grieves me inexpressibly to know that such a state of things exists, and that I implore them to do their part to heal our country's wounds." Another such anecdote is an incident in Lexington, Virginia, the location of Washington College, where Lee served as president. A young man named Erastus Johnston, a former Union soldier who was living in Lexington while he worked to educate freedmen, was harassed by a group of Lex-

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preferred, gave them the opportunity to withdraw. In other words, Lee disciplined the students who had harassed and confronted a former Union soldier.

A final anecdote about reconciliation was mentioned by Mr. Eash in his presentation. This anecdote occurred when Lee was invited in 1869 by the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association to take part in a reunion of officers to memorialize the battle. Lee declined the invitation and added, "I think it wiser moreover not to keep open the sores of war, but to follow the example of those nations who endeavored to obliterate the marks of civil strife and to commit to oblivion the feelings it engendered." There's that word again: oblivion, except Lee is using it as the rightful place for the feelings of enmity that were given life by the Civil War and by the discord that led to it. In addition, Lee's reply to the invitation reiterates the sentiment in his comment to Christina Bond about healing the country's wounds. Mr. Eash seemed to use Lee's reply to the invitation to indicate Lee's desire to bury the misdeeds of the Confederacy from the nation's consciousness as a way of making everyone forget how badly former Confederates had acted. In contrast, Lee biographers generally interpret Lee's comment about not keeping open the sores of war as a sincere desire for reconciliation, and this interpretation is supported by Lee's comment to Christina Bond about healing the nation's wounds, particularly in light of Lee's remark about it being "unworthy" of Southerners "to cherish feelings of resentment against the North." In all, a compelling argument can be made that Lee genuinely desired reconciliation between the North and the South and set an example for this goal. As such, Lee was attempting to repair the sectional damage that secession had done, and because of this he can be said to be deserving of some positive consideration with regard to criticism of him for his misguided decision to side with the Confederacy.

3c. Did Lee deserve Douglass' harsh criticism more than any other person associated with the Confederacy? — Lee's racism

Another aspect of the third question, which Mr. Eash addressed in his presentation, was Lee's clear racism. Mr. Eash pointed out a number of quotes by Lee which indisputably demonstrate Lee's racism. However, Lee was by no means the only racist Confederate leader and for that reason was no more deserving of Douglass' strident criticism than, for example, Alexander Stephens, the author of the Cornerstone Speech, which enshrined slavery as the cornerstone of the Confederacy, or, in Stephens words, "Our new government is founded upon...the great truth, that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery — subordination to the superior race — is his natural and normal condition." Hence, while Lee can never be absolved from being a racist, Douglass is likewise no more justified to target Lee as a racist than to target any other Confederate leader.

One piece of evidence that Mr. Eash offered as evidence of Lee's racism, although the Lee quotes on their own are sufficient evidence in support of this, is purported minutes from a Ku Klux Klan convention which took place in 1867. According to these minutes, a Klan delegation was sent to Lee to inform him of the Klan's activities in addressing the poor conditions in the South and to seek his approval. This delegation also supposedly asked Lee his opinion of naming Nathan Bedford Forrest to be the Klan's leader, which Lee wholeheartedly endorsed. Mr. Eash was careful to indicate that this anecdote is of questionable authenticity, but it seems to me that his inclusion of this anecdote is an unfair attempt to make Lee's racism appear intensely odious by connecting Lee to the Ku Klux Klan on questionable grounds. There is another Lee anecdote of uncertain authenticity which paints Lee in a significantly different

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light. According to this anecdote, on a Sunday in Richmond after the Civil War, at a service in St. Paul's Church, the presiding minister invited the congregants to come to the chancel rail for communion. Immediately after this invitation, a black man rose and walked to the rail, at which point, according to a witness, the "effect upon the communicants was startling, and for several moments they retained their seats in solemn silence and did not move." But then another man stood up, walked to the rail, and knelt near the black man. That second person who went to the chancel rail was Robert E. Lee. This anecdote about Lee and the chancel rail, like the anecdote about Lee and the Ku Klux Klan, is of uncertain authenticity, and Lee's motive in acting as he did, whether righteous or dishonorable, can never be known. But at face value, the anecdote about Lee and the chancel rail adds a different element to his racist views. This is not to say that Lee was not a racist, because he clearly was. But it seems to me to be only fair that if the Ku Klux Klan anecdote of dubious authenticity is going to be presented, then the chancel rail anecdote of uncertain authenticity should also be included.

3d. Did Lee deserve Douglass' harsh criticism more than any other person associated with the Confederacy? — Lee's death

Another reason that Douglass chose to target Lee was the timing of Lee's death, which happened on October 12, 1870. As Mr. Eash discussed, Lee's death occurred at a time when Douglass was well-positioned to disseminate harsh criticism of Lee through speeches and, especially, articles in newspapers with which Douglass was associated. Lee's death also thrust Lee into the nation's consciousness, at least for that brief moment. No longer was Lee laboring in obscurity as the president of a college in a small, poorly accessible Virginia city. Lee's death flared him into prominence in a way that his continued life as the president of Washington College could never have done. This provided a one-time opportunity, both for those who desired to defend the Confederacy and for Douglass, who wanted to assail the Confederacy. Both the defenders of the Confederacy and Douglass were presented a chance to use Lee, at this time of national attention on him, as the symbol for their case. As Mr. Eash discussed, Douglass did not hesitate to jump at this opportunity. The obvious question is, would Douglass have used Lee as the target of his attack on the Confederacy if Lee had not died when he did? If Douglass had wanted to use his newspaper articles to attack the Confederacy during the time frame that he did, and if Lee had not died during that time frame, but not until much later, would Douglass still have targeted Lee with harsh criticism as a means of criticizing the Confederacy? For that matter, if Lee had outlived Douglass, would Douglass have chosen to make Lee the symbol of the Confederacy that Douglass used in his criticism? In other words, was it fair to Lee, relative to any other Confederate leader, for Douglass to make him the primary target in his criticism of the Confederacy simply, or at least partly, because Lee died when he did?

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Conclusion

Taken together, the issues discussed above (the fact that Lee, through no choice of his own, was chosen by defenders of the Confederacy to be its icon, the fact that Lee was the most effective Confederate military leader, the timing of Lee's death) are not, in my opinion, valid reasons for Lee, relative to any other Confederate leader, to be the primary target of Douglass' harsh criticism. Douglass was more than justified in attacking the Confederacy, but the reasons noted above do not comprise a strong argument to justify Douglass using Lee, more so than any other Confederate leader, as a punching bag in his attack on the Confederacy. In addition, other issues discussed above (the fact that Lee took measures to prevent the continuation of hostilities in a guerilla war, the fact that Lee took steps after the war to foster reconciliation) provide evidence that Lee deserves some credit for helping to ease the sectional strife, something of a time off for good behavior rationale. Based on these latter issues, a case can be made that Lee is less deserving than his Confederate compatriots for Douglass' harsh criticism, and, in fact, these deeds are deserving of retaining in our memory of Lee rather than condemning to oblivion.

I am grateful to Codie Eash for giving us such an informative, thought-provoking, and well-delivered presentation. Prior to this presentation, I was completely unaware of Frederick Douglass' campaign against the legacy of Robert E. Lee, and for me this presentation was very instructive. I am also grateful to our Roundtable's president, Steve Pettyjohn, for including Codie Eash on the program schedule. That was a great call by Steve, and after experiencing Codie Eash's excellent presentation, I can understand why Steve included him on the schedule. As I said at the beginning, I am an admirer of Robert E. Lee, and obviously this influences my opinion of Douglass' criticism of him. But with that as a disclaimer, it is my opinion that Douglass was not totally justified in using Lee as the primary target for his criticism of the Confederacy. With regard to the three questions posed at the beginning, it is my opinion that Lee was deserving of criticism for his role in the Civil War. It is also my opinion that it was good strategy by Douglass to specifically target Lee given Lee's iconic status in the aftermath of the Civil War. But in my opinion Douglass was not completely justified in targeting Lee more so than any other Confederate leader, and there are reasons, relative to other Confederate leaders, that Lee should not have been singled out for harsh criticism. In other words, by targeting Lee Douglass made a strategically correct decision, but in the overall scheme of the circumstances in which Douglass made his decision to target Lee, it was not a totally justified decision. As for the obvious question of what Douglass should have done instead of specifically targeting Lee, that is a topic for another discussion.

Acknowledgment: I thank Mike Wells for his valuable advice and suggestions, which were very helpful in the writing of this essay. Mike still disagrees with me.

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HISTORY BRIEF – CCWRT – DANIEL J. URSU, HISTORIAN – Copyright November 11, 2020

GRANT’S COMBINED ARMS GENERALSHIP AT VICKSBURG – Part II

We resume where we left off in October with General Grant having decided to move ahead with Admiral Porter’s daring plan to help achieve Grant’s goal of ultimately landing troops on dry ground on the east bank of the Mississippi south of Vicksburg. Porter’s plan was to slip by Fortress Vicksburg “running the batteries” under the cover of darkness. However, before we venture further, one of our members, Brian Kowell, after reading last month’s History Brief submitted some additional research to me on the ironclads in Porter’s fleet that I believe readers of this History Brief would enjoy.

Please recall from last month that four river ironclads of the “City Class”, also known as the “Cairo Class”, and lastly also known as “Pook’s Turtles” after the name of their designer; would make up a substantial portion of the fleet, namely the *Louisville*, *Mound City*, *Pittsburg* and *Carondolet*. The sister ships were identically constructed and armed but were fascinatingly differentiated by multi colored rings painted on the smoke stacks of each ship. Further, although by the time of this engagement various armaments had been modified as to type and caliber, Brian’s research shows that they each still carried 13 guns.

For readers who have visited Vicksburg, you know that the “*Cairo*”, also one of “Pook’s Turtles”, was sunk in the Yazoo River on December 12, 1862 by Confederates employing an electronically detonated mine. This is widely thought to be the first vessel in naval history to be sunk by such a device. About 100 years later the *Cairo* was dredged up, under the direction of Edwin C. Bearss, former Chief Historian of the National Park Service. Mr. Bearss spoke at our Round Table numerous times and for the final time at our Round Table on December 12, 2018 during my CCWRT Presidential year. *May Mr. Bearss Rest in Peace*. Further, under his direction, the *Cairo* was refurbished and put on display in Vicksburg. Brian Kowell was able to research the precise armament found at the wreckage of the “*Cairo*” in the early 1960’s:

1. 8 inch Navy Gun w/ carriage salvaged 9/14/1960 loaded w/ canister
2. 30 pdr Naval Parrot Rifle 10/20/1963 loaded w/ explosive shell (against Regulations)
3. 32 pdr smoothbore 10/20/1963 not loaded presumably had been just fired
4. 8 inch Navy gun 10/25/1963 loaded w/ double charge of canister

5. 42 pdr rifle (originally smoothbore but had been rifled) 10/27/1963 port bow gun loaded with explosive shell filled with Shrapnel
6. 42 pdr rifle 10/27/1963 starboard bow gun load w/ 87 Pd explosive shell
7. 32 pdr smoothbore 10/27/1963 no. 1 port gun doubled loaded w/ canister its tube dismantled from torpedo explosion
8. 42 pdr rifle no. 1 starboard gun loaded w/ 87pd explosive shell 10/31/1963
9. 8 inch Navy gun 11/6/1963 no. 3 port gun loaded w/ grape

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11. 32 pdr smoothbore 11/1963 no. 4 port gun loaded w/ solid shot
12. 32 pdr smoothbore 11/6/1963 no. 4 starboard gun
13. 32 pdr smoothbore 11/6/1963 stern starboard gun

When Mr. Bearss was here in 2018, he mentioned that his first visit to our round table was during the Kennedy Administration's Cuban Missile Crisis in October of 1962. So, at the time of his initial visit, Mr. Bearss was actively working on the *Cairo* dredging project. How impressed our members must have been at that time to hear all about it!

Having digressed, let's go back to 1863. Accordingly, four of *Cairo's* sister ships and other vessels were assembled in Admiral Porter's flotilla on the evening of April 16, 1863. They were floating in the Mississippi River north of Vicksburg and configured in a line bow to stern about 150 feet apart. Each captain was to steer slightly leftward to avoid the ship ahead should it become disabled once the fleet proceeded and came under fire.

Ironclad *Benton* was at the head of the van; she was lashed to the tug *Ivy*; followed by ironclad *Lafayette* which was lashed to *General Price*; thence ironclads *Louisville*, *Mound City*, *Pittsburgh*, *Carondolet*; next came three army transports and finally the ironclad *Tuscumbria*. To ensure surprise, the attempt to run the batteries would be made at night sans lighting except what was needed for signaling purposes. That illumination was shielded under hooded lanterns that would not be visible to Confederate cannoners. The van would move at low speed until sighted to keep engine noise to a minimum; they would essentially depend on the mighty river's strong current to advance.

Anchors were weighed in at about 10:30 PM under a clear, star filled night. At this very moment, General Pemberton, the confederate commander at Vicksburg, his officers and townsfolk were at a dance celebrating recent events that they misinterpreted as a retreat by Grant. How better to describe what happened next during arguably the most pivotal moment of the Civil War, than to turn to the eyewitness account of General Grant himself from his Memoirs:

“Soon after the start a battery between Vicksburg and Warrenton opened fire across the intervening peninsula, followed by the upper batteries, and then by batteries all along the line. The gunboats ran up close under the bluffs, delivering their fire in return at short distances, probably without much effect. They were under fire for more than two hours and every vessel was struck many times, but with little damage to the gunboats. The transports did not fare so well. The *Henry Clay* was disabled and deserted by her crew. Soon after a shell burnt in the cotton packed about the boilers, set the vessel on fire and burned her to the water's edge. The burning mass, however, floated down to Carthage before grounding, as did also one of the barges in tow. The enemy were evidently expecting our fleet, for they were ready to light up the river by means of bonfires on the east side and by firing houses on the point of land opposite the city on the Louisiana side. The sight was magnificent, but terrible. I witnessed it from the deck of a river transport, run out into the middle of the river and as low down as it was prudent to go. My mind was much relieved when I learned that no one on the transports had been killed and but few, if any, wounded. During the running of the batteries men were stationed in the holds of the transports to partially stop with cotton shot-holes that might be made in the hulls. All damage was afterwards soon repaired under the direction Admiral Porter.”

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The Union broadsides in response to the south's plunging fire from positions on the east bank bluffs of the Mississippi, were blindly fired at the Confederate batteries above to no avail. Conversely, about 530 rounds were fired by the rebel batteries of which about 70 found targets. Porter later in a private letter indicated that he incurred heavier damage than mentioned in the official reports stating: "as it will not do to let the enemy know how often they hit us, and show how vulnerable we are. Their heavy shot walked right through us as if we were made of putty." Nevertheless, the venture was a resounding success with all of the ironclads and two of three transports making it successfully past the fortress at the human cost of fourteen wounded men.

In the meantime, Grant had ordered Sherman to deceive General Pemberton with a feint along the Yazoo River to coerce him into thinking that a major Union attack would be mounted from north of Vicksburg.

Further, Grant ordered Cavalry Colonel Benjamin Grierson, a former music teacher, composer and abolitionist, whose formative years were spent in Youngstown, Ohio; to depart with three regiments of cavalry to raid central Mississippi. The purpose of the raid was to destroy rebel communications, supplies, munitions and to generally create havoc. Grierson's rampage went on for sixteen days from April 16th to May 2nd. His 1,700 troopers of the heretofore often maligned Union cavalry performed a raid that was among the most successful use of cavalry by either side during the entire war. As some termed it, Grierson's cavalry rode "Roughshod through Dixie" and not only did they destroy all manner of extremely hard to replace southern goods, they also drew thousands of Rebel troops away from Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi; soldiers that were consequently woefully out of position to counter Grant's soon to be launched attack on Vicksburg. Also of importance, according to Sergeant Surby, one of Grierson's ablest and most distinguished scouts, the troopers "played smash with the railroads". For example, the damage wrought to the *New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern Railroad* was so thorough that it was rendered useless the remainder of the war. In sum, the raid spectacularly augmented materially and strategically to Grant's campaign.

On April 20th, with the fleet below Vicksburg, Grant's immediate goal was within grasp as he wrote the open ended order for his command to "obtain a foothold on the east bank of the Mississippi River, from which Vicksburg can be approached by practicable roads". General McLernand thusly was in motion with three corps marching southward along the west bank of the Mississippi. They were to rendezvous with Porter's fleet in anticipation of being transported to the east bank in the vicinity of Grand Gulf about 25 miles as the crow flies south of Vicksburg.

Now, Grant was orchestrating and bringing heavily to bear on the unwitting Confederate General Pemberton, the full might of the combined arms resources of the Union's infantry, cavalry and navy in that part of the western theater of war. Truly a man of vitality and confidence, any notion of Catton's "slouchy little man" from [This Hallowed Ground](#) leading up to April 1863 was now cast asunder. One of Grant's officers at this juncture wrote about Grant: "None who had known him the previous years could recognize him as being the same man...From this time his genius and his energies seemed to burst forth with new life".

While probably not quite yet the Civil War's "indispensable man", we will track Grant's next steps toward earning that sobriquet in December's History Brief. We will see Union troops endeavor a military crossing of the Mississippi River in enemy territory and watch Grant begin to explore for those "practicable roads"!

Respectfully submitted,
Daniel J. Ursu
CCWRT Historian

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CCWRT Meeting December 11th

Program: Kelly Boyer Sagert will present “Wells Waite Miller and the 8th OVI.”

Kelly Boyer Sagert is a fulltime freelance writer living in Lorain, Ohio. She writes frequently on historical topics, including the Underground Railroad and Civil War. She is part of an Emmy-Award-nominated team for the 2016 Best Historical Documentary, where she received full writing credits. She has published fourteen books, several of them historical in nature, and has been commissioned to write five historical plays. Ms. Boyer Sagert is a member of the American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA) and the Society for American Baseball Research

The program will be conducted via Zoom so be on the look out for a Zoom invitation a day or two before November 11 ,

The session will start at 7 p.m.

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