

THE CHARGER



CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

MAY 2020

VOL. 43 #5

Executive Committee 2020/2021

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Message from the President – May 1, 2020 – C. Ellen Connally

America faced many challenges during the Civil War. Today America faces even more challenges as we deal with the coronavirus. The current conflicts between the authority of the federal government and the states are sadly reminiscent of questions that arose in the 1860s.

As the Roundtable looks to the coming season, the officers and I have been in frequent contact regarding the immediate future of the organization. We hope that all members will read their emails and check our website and Facebook page for updates. Paid members will soon receive an email instructing them on how to vote for the 2020-2021 officers. Please respond as soon as you get the email.

While we hope to return to Judson Manor in September, we are cautious in our expectations. Since Judson is a retirement community its management may continue to limit outside guests for the foreseeable future. We have investigated and are prepared to change locations if necessary. Vice President Steve Pettyjohn has worked diligently in preparing for the field trip scheduled for September 25 – 26, 2020. Again, we will keep you posted as to any possible changes.

It has been a pleasure to serve as President of the Roundtable. It was an exciting year, and the team effort made by the officers and executive committee has led to many changes that will lead to a healthy future for the organization. In passing the torch to Steve Pettyjohn I know that the organization will be in strong hands. I plan to continue to work with the officers to do whatever I can to strengthen and perpetuate the legacy of our great organization and the history of the Civil War.

C. Ellen Connally

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In Search of “Brierfield” the Lost Plantation of Jefferson Davis

By Paul Siedel

Although no one really knows, it was probably a beautiful sunny day in February 1861 when a telegram arrived at the Davis plantation “Brierfield” just south Vicksburg, Mississippi. Davis and his wife Varina were in the rose garden when a rider on horseback galloped up and gave them the message



stating that Davis had been elected president of the newly formed Confederate States of America. The news was bitter sweet as Davis, who had just resigned his post as U.S. senator from Mississippi, decided to forgo his leisurely days at the plantation he loved and accept the challenge. The couple prepared to leave Briarfield, for Montgomery, Alabama. Little did they know that when they left that February day they would never return to the home as they knew it.

Back in 1814 Joseph Davis, the older brother of Jefferson , came into nearly 7,000 acres on a bend in the Mississippi just south of Vicksburg. Using slave labor he cleared the land and the bend in the River quickly became known as Davis Bend. Shortly afterwards a mighty storm swept across the lower Mississippi and the Davis Plantation was severely damaged. They quickly rebuilt the home and called it “The Hurricane”. The plantation prospered and after the death of his first wife Sarah Knox Taylor Davis, Jefferson came to the Hurricane to mend his badly damaged emotions. He was given a section of the acreage and soon began farming the land he called Brierfield. The Davis brothers prospered; although Jefferson was absent much of the time Brierfield became very profitable. Other than the fact that he had trouble finding competent overseers, the huge cotton crop was easily harvested and shipped to New Orleans each year. In 1848 Davis decided to build a house on his portion of the estate and invite his widowed sister to live there with Varina, his wife, whom he had married in 1845. He entered a contract with Marcy & Zeigler, and the book “Brierfield” by Frank Edgar Everett Jr., it states that the building cost \$10,000. Marcy & Zeigler, a construction company out of New Orleans, were contracted to do the carpenters’ work and supply materials including plastering and glazing, all except the timber framing which was supplied by timber cut on the property.

After the War Joseph Davis successfully sued to gain control of the estate. He then soon after sold it to an African-American real-estate company controlled by James Pemberton. However the company failed to pay either interest or principal on the loan due to a disastrous flood which occurred in 1867.

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The Mississippi River burst through the levee and Davis Bend became Davis Island. After extensive legal arguments, Joseph Davis once again regained title to the Davis estate. He and Jefferson both retained control until Joseph's death in 1873 and Jefferson's death in 1889. Neither Joseph Davis or Jefferson ever returned to Davis Island to live. Jefferson Davis lived on the Mississippi gulf coast and seeing as how The Hurricane house had been burned Joseph lived near Jackson. In 1889 Jefferson Davis was actually traveling back from Briarfield when he was stricken with bronchitis; he was taken to the home of a friend in New Orleans where he died shortly afterwards. The Davis descendants continued to own the property through the intervening years, although renting and leasing it out to various farmers in the area. Then in 1931 the Briarfield house that Jefferson had built caught fire and burned; it was totally destroyed. Now only the remains of the foundation and the old deserted road which led to the home are all that remain of Briarfield.

Today the entire Davis estate on Davis Island is in private hands and is a wildlife refuge and hunting preserve. Since the property was disconnected from the mainland back in 1867, the best way to access it is by plane from Vicksburg. Permission of the owners is necessary. A tall stand of giant oaks marks the place where The Hurricane used to stand. If one travels the old road linking Briarfield with The Hurricane, they can walk through a natural forest which is home to many species of plants native to Mississippi. Classes from Alcon University frequently come the island to study the flora and fauna found growing there.

As in many rural places folklore has crept up concerning the forests on Davis Island. Some folks who have spent the night in the forest on the island say that one can hear the singing of the Davis slaves as they worked the soil, and some say they have seen many ghostly figures drifting through the forest that was once the home to one of America's most famous couples.

"[Slave Quarters at Briarfield Plantation, home of Jefferson Davis, Davis Bend, Warren County, Mississippi,](http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/39862)" House Divided: The Civil War Research Engine at Dickinson College, <http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/39862>.



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The First Memorial Day by David A. Carrino

Near the end of May, we in the U.S. participate in an annual remembrance of those who gave, as Abraham Lincoln said, "the last full measure of devotion" in defense of our country. This is done on the day that has come to be known as Memorial Day. This commemoration was codified by John Logan, the commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, which was an organization of Union veterans who had fought in the Civil War. On May 5, 1868 Logan issued his directive for this commemoration in his General Orders No. 11, in which he specified that the remembrance would take place on May 30, 1868. Logan's directive stated that May 30, 1868 "is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country." The wording that Logan used led to the day of commemoration being called Decoration Day, although the Grand Army of the Republic stipulated in a follow-up directive that "the proper designation of May 30th is Memorial Day" and further stipulated that it should be an annual event. After World War I, Memorial Day came to be a day to remember those who died not just in the Civil War, but in all of America's wars. On Memorial Day, when we commemorate those who gave their lives for our country, we are following a long-standing tradition, a tradition that began in 1868. Or did it?

Although John Logan's General Orders No. 11 codified Memorial Day and the practice of spreading flowers on the graves of those who died in war, there is compelling evidence that there were Memorial Days in the U.S. prior to 1868. One such place where this happened is Columbus, Mississippi, which is in northeast Mississippi and is the birthplace of noted American playwright Tennessee Williams. In the spring of 1866, four women met and decided to honor the Civil War dead who were buried in the local cemetery. These four women are Jane Fontaine, Kate Hill, Martha Morton, and Augusta Cox. On April 25, 1866, a large group of women, who had been brought together by the four who met, went to the cemetery and spread flowers on the graves of the war dead. As it happened, there were not only Confederate dead in that cemetery, but Union dead as well. The women were perhaps moved by the thought that the Union dead, although the enemy, were also someone's husband, son, father, or brother, and they spread flowers not just on the graves of the Confederate dead, but on the graves of the Union dead as well. In its report about the event, a local newspaper in Columbus, Mississippi wrote, "We were glad to see that no distinction was made between our own dead and about forty Federal soldiers, who slept their last sleep by them...Confederate and Federal — once enemies, now friends — receiving this tribute of respect." Because of the observance that was organized by those four women, Columbus, Mississippi claims to be the birthplace of Memorial Day.

Other places in the U.S. also claim to be the location of the first Memorial Day, including Knoxville and Memphis in Tennessee, Jackson, Mississippi, Kingston, Georgia, Charleston, South Carolina, Boalsburg, Pennsylvania, Carbondale, Illinois, and Richmond and Petersburg in Virginia. There is even a Columbus, Georgia which disputes the claim of Columbus, Mississippi as the birthplace of Memorial Day and insists that the Columbus in Georgia rightly has this distinction. One feature that was common to all of these commemorations was the placing of flowers on the graves of the war dead. In 1966 a Congressional resolution that was affirmed by President Lyndon Johnson proclaimed Waterloo, New York as the birthplace of Memorial Day,

At Lafayette, Ind., on decoration day, a sensation was created on the receipt by the committee of arrangements, of this note from a ten-year old:

Oh, Leaning: Will you please put this wreath upon some rebel soldier's grave? My dear papa is buried at Andersonville and perhaps some little girl will be kind enough to put a few flowers upon his grave.
JENNIE VERNON.

The wreath was deposited upon the grave of an unknown Confederate soldier, the only one remaining in the cemetery.
God bless little Jennie!

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Memorial Day cont.

Other places in the U.S. also claim to be the location of the first Memorial Day, including Knoxville and Memphis in Tennessee, Jackson, Mississippi, Kingston, Georgia, Charleston, South Carolina, Boalsburg, Pennsylvania, Carbondale, Illinois, and Richmond and Petersburg in Virginia. There is even a Columbus, Georgia which disputes the claim of Columbus, Mississippi as the birthplace of Memorial Day and insists that the Columbus in Georgia rightly has this distinction. One feature that was common to all of these commemorations was the placing of flowers on the graves of the war dead. In 1966 a Congressional resolution that was affirmed by President Lyndon Johnson proclaimed Waterloo, New York as the birthplace of Memorial Day, even though the first observance in that city happened later than the commemorations in other places. Those who support Waterloo's claim assert that the observances in other locations did not involve the entire community. Whichever place can rightly claim the distinction as the first location of Memorial Day, it is almost certain that John Logan's inspiration for a nationwide observance came from the commemorations that occurred in these various places. There are different explanations for how this inspiration came to Logan, including one that involves his wife, Mary, suggesting it to him after she observed the graves of Confederate dead strewn with flowers during a post-war trip to Petersburg, Virginia.

One aspect of the observance in Columbus, Mississippi, which distinguishes that commemoration, is the fact that it was, as far as is known, the first in which both Union and Confederate dead were honored. In this sense, the observance in Columbus, Mississippi had the kind of inclusiveness that such ceremonies should have. In contrast, John Logan's General Orders No. 11 lacked this spirit of inclusiveness and reconciliation, in that Logan stipulated in his order that Memorial Day is intended for honoring those "who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion." In addition, a later clarification in a resolution that was adopted by the Grand Army of the Republic indicated that the observance was meant "to preserve the memory of those only who fought in defense of the National Unity." Perhaps John Logan and the Grand Army of the Republic, with the gruesome hostilities still fresh in their memories, can be excused for their lack of inclusiveness. However, when the Columbus, Mississippi newspaper reported how the local women honored the fallen of both sides, the newspaper noted that the magnanimous conduct of the women "proved the exalted, unselfish tone of the female character."

One of the most noble expressions of the same spirit of reconciliation that was displayed by the women of Columbus, Mississippi occurred in Lafayette, Indiana during the first national observance of Memorial Day in 1868. Lafayette, Indiana had been the site of a prisoner of war camp during the Civil War, and Confederate prisoners who died there were buried in a local cemetery. In the spring of 1868, while a committee in Lafayette was making preparations for the national observance, a girl named Jennie Vernon, who resided in Lafayette, sent a wreath and a note to the committee. The note read, "Will you please put this wreath upon some rebel soldier's grave? My dear papa is buried at Andersonville, and perhaps some little girl will be kind enough to put a few flowers upon his grave." Jennie's father was Samuel Vernon, a member of a cavalry company, who was captured on October 17, 1863 and sent to Andersonville. Samuel Vernon died on June 24, 1864 and is buried in Andersonville National Cemetery. In 1879 Jennie married a man named Charles Crain, and she lived in Lafayette, Indiana for the rest of her life.

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Memorial Day cont.

The spirit of reconciliation that was displayed by the women of Columbus, Mississippi on April 25, 1866 inspired a literary expression of that same spirit of reconciliation. This literary expression is a poem that was written by Francis Miles Finch, a lawyer and judge who lived in Ithaca, New York, and who composed poetry as a hobby. Finch reputedly saw a news report in the *New York Tribune* about the commemoration that was organized by the four women in Columbus, Mississippi, and he was so moved that the women honored the dead of both sides that he composed a poem titled "The Blue and the Gray." The words of Finch's poem address the grief felt by those, in both the North and the South, who lost loved ones in the Civil War. Moreover, the final verse seems to speak to the inclusive actions of the women who spread flowers on the graves of both Union and Confederate dead and how that act of reconciliation helped to remove the feelings of animosity from former enemies. Finch's poem reads in part, "By the flow of the inland river, / Whence the fleets of iron have fled, / Where the blades of the grave-grass quiver, / Asleep are ranks of the dead: / Under the sod and the dew, / Waiting the judgement-day; / Under the one, the Blue, / Under the other, the Gray. / These in the robings of glory, / Those in the gloom of defeat, / All with the battle-blood gory, / In the dusk of eternity meet: / Under the sod and the dew, / Waiting the judgement-day; / Under the laurel, the Blue, / Under the willow, the Gray.... / No more shall the war cry sever, / Or the winding rivers be red; / They banish our anger forever, / When they laurel the graves of our dead! / Under the sod and the dew, / Waiting the judgement-day; / Love and tears for the Blue, / Tears and love for the Gray."

When we observe Memorial Day, we should keep in mind that this commemoration grew from a number of local remembrances into an annual nationwide observance. [It does not matter which city can rightly claim to be the birthplace of Memorial Day, because, in reality, the many people who took it upon themselves to decorate the graves of the war dead are truly the ones who gave birth to Memorial Day.](#) The most important aspect of this observance is not who did it first. The most important aspect of this observance is to remember and honor all those who gave their lives for our country. In this regard, John Logan, in his General Orders No. 11, expressed well the sentiment and respect that should permeate Memorial Day. Logan wrote, "We should guard their graves with sacred vigilance. All that the consecrated wealth and taste of the nation can add to their adornment and security is but a fitting tribute to the memory of her slain defenders. Let no wanton foot tread rudely on such hallowed grounds. Let pleasant paths invite the coming and going of reverent visitors and fond mourners. Let no vandalism of avarice or neglect, no ravages of time, testify to the present or to the coming generations that we have forgotten, as a people, the cost of a free and undivided republic."



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The remainder of The Charger is devoted to book reviews by members of the CCWRT.

Earlier this year Book Authority issued:

12 Best New American Civil War Books to Read in 2020

<https://bookauthority.org/books/new-american-civil-war-books>

Just recently released is:

Ted Whitmer. *Lincoln on the Verge*.

It recounts Lincoln's 1861 13-day train trip from Springfield to Washington City (including a stop in Cleveland).

See Martin Pengelly. "What it means to be an American: Abraham Lincoln and a nation divided" The Guardian: <https://theguardian.com/books/2020/apr/11/>

More new Civil War Books: April 2020

Civil War Books and Authors: <https://cwba.blogspot.com/>

Dennis Keating

The best book I've most recently read is ***Churchill and Orwell – The Fight for Freedom*** by Thomas E. Ricks (2017). It caught my eye at the library (a little before libraries closed for the duration) because of the author's name – I used to enjoy reading Tom Ricks regularly in the Washington Post on-line, when he was their Defense Dept. reporter. He wrote trenchant articles about the United States' misadventures in Mideast wars – cutting through Administration PR with a laser-like precision.

Churchill (1874 – 1965) was much older than Orwell (1903 – 1950), but the heights of their public lives were strikingly congruent. The book is very well written, with alternate chapters about their war-time experiences, and especially their growing anti-totalitarian warnings post World War II.

Reading this book motivated me to re-read *Animal Farm* first, and I'm now re-reading *1984*. The latter is a tough slog in that its anti-authoritarian theme is depressingly apt in these days, as if one needs a reminder.

After a reading a raft of non-fiction books, and with no access to a library, I'm probably going to reread *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* next – it will be more than refreshing to celebrate good triumphing over evil. I know the ending, but worry about our real world.

Jim Heflich

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Just finished reading “**John Bell Hood and the Fight for Civil War Memory.**” By Brian Craig Miller from The University of Tennessee Press (Knoxville). Very much different from any C.W. Bio I’ve read in that it dwells on his personal life, motivations for decisions and his final 14 years in New Orleans after the War. Most biographies have about twenty pages antebellum career and twenty pages post war career and four hundred and fifty pages of what they did during the Civil War which one can get from Battles and Leaders. This biography is unique in that respect. It goes into his affair with Sally Preston and what effect she may have had on his ambitions and strategies. It states that never has it been substantiated that Hood was affected by laudanum during the Tennessee Campaign although he was taking pain medication at that time. On January 23, 1865 Hood formally resigned as head of the Army of Tennessee; he was in Flat Rock, North Carolina when he heard the news of Lee’s surrender and was on his way to Texas to do recruiting duty when he finally surrendered on May 31, 1865 at Natchez, Mississippi. The book delves into his family life after the War and his affiliation with “The Life Association of America” a life insurance company. He married Anna Marie Hennen and went on to raise a family of eleven children. He, his wife, and oldest daughter died in the yellow fever epidemic of 1879. The book goes on to talk about the relationship he had with other Confederate generals after the War and his death and burial in New Orleans. The book discusses the fate of his children and why the effort to provide for them after his death never materialized.

I feel this book lets one get to know the real John Bell Hood his life and times. I’ve been motivated to look into the fates of his ten surviving children, and where they ended up after the break up of the family. A great book to read of one is interested in the personalities of Civil War figures. Mr. Miller does a great job and goes off the beaten path to present Hood and his story.

Paul Siedel

Howard Bahr. *The Black Flower: A Novel of the Civil War* (1997)

Bahr, a Mississippi creative writing educator, has written a graphic tale of some hometown soldiers of the 21st Mississippi at the 1864 battle of Franklin and the day after. It follows these soldiers as they prepare for the suicidal Confederate assault and then as the many wounded and dying are taken to the McGavock estate. Its main Confederate character is cared for by a McGavock cousin who has already lost two other Confederate soldiers. The novel is and has been recognized as one of the best Civil War novels.

The novel has the regiment one of the Mississippi regiments in Adam's brigade, Loring's division, A. P. Stewart's Corps. The actual 21st Mississippi first fought in the major battles of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia before going West to fight at Chickamauga and Knoxville. It then returned East for the Overland Campaign, the Petersburg siege, Early's Shenandoah Valley campaign, and finally Lee's retreat and surrender. Of the 684 who began the war, at Appomattox Court House, 4 officers and 44 enlisted survivors surrendered.

Dennis Keating

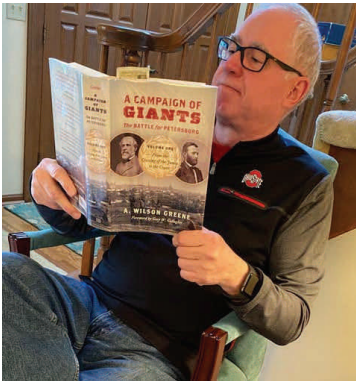
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Our new president Steve Pettyjohn hard at work preparing for the next CCWRT season. Have a good summer.

NOTE : The May 11th program has been canceled due to the corona virus.

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