

THE CHARGER

December 2011

482nd Meeting

Vol. 33 #4

Tonight's Program:

How Sibling Rivalry Helped Spawn An Assassin

The Booth family was an English-American theatrical family of the 19th century. The patriarch was Junius Brutus Booth, a London-born lawyer's son who eventually became an actor after he attended a production of *Othello* at the Covent Garden theater. The prospects of fame, fortune, and freedom were very appealing to young Booth and he displayed remarkable talent from an early age, deciding on a career in the theater by the age of seventeen. He performed roles in several small theaters throughout England and joined a tour of the Low Countries in 1814, returning the following year to make his London debut.

Booth abandoned his wife and young son in 1821 and ran off to the United States with Mary Ann Holmes, a London flower girl. Settling near Baltimore, Maryland, Booth and Holmes had ten children. Edwin Booth was born in 1833 and came to be the foremost American Shakespearean actor of his day. In his early career, he often performed alongside his father. Edwin toured throughout the United States and Europe. After Junius's death in 1852, Edwin went on a worldwide tour, visiting Australia and Hawaii, and finally gained acclaim of his own during an engagement in Sacramento, California. In 1869, he founded Booth's Theatre in New York, which was quite modern for its time. Some theatrical historians consider him the greatest American actor and the greatest Hamlet of the 19th century.



John Wilkes Booth, Edwin Booth and
Junius Brutus Booth Jr. in
Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in 1864.

Tonight's Speaker:

Nora Titone

Nora Titone studied American History and Literature as an undergraduate at Harvard University and earned an M.A. in History at the University of California, Berkeley. She has worked as a historical researcher for a range of academics, writers, and artists involved in projects studying 19th century America, including Doris Kearns Goodwin for Goodwin's book *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. She is the author of *My Thoughts Be Bloody: The Bitter Rivalry That Led to the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*.



Date: Wednesday,
December 14, 2011

Place: Judson Manor
1890 E. 107th Street
Cleveland, Ohio

Time: Drinks 6 pm
Dinner 6:45 pm

Reservations: Please send an email to ccwrt1956@yahoo.com with your reservation, or call Dan Zeiser at (440) 449-9311 by 9 pm the Sunday before the meeting.

Meal: Entree, vegetable, salad, and dessert.

**CLEVELAND
CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE
FOUNDED 1957**

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Editor - THE CHARGER - Dan Zeiser

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1991 Joe Tirpak
1990 Ken Callahan Jr.
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1979 William Bates
1978 Richard McCrae
1977 James Chapman
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1975 Thomas Gretter
1974 Nolan Heidelbaugh
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1968 Frank Moran
1967 William Schlesinger
1966 Donald Hamill
1965 Lester Swift
1964 Guy DiCarlo Jr.
1963 Paul Guenther
1962 Edward Downer
1961 Charles Clarke
1960 Howard Preston
1959 John Cullen Jr.
1958 George Farr Jr.
1957 Kenneth Grant

President's Message December 2011

My greatest fear in planning this year's CCWRT program schedule was that I would have a speaker cancel on me at the last minute. Well, in November, my fear came true when our scheduled speaker, Jason Emerson, had to cancel his talk with us - not quite at the last minute, but close. Now, one of the great strengths of our group is the number of polished, experienced, and knowledgeable speakers who are members. You could fill many years of program schedules with only members of our club and the programs would be excellent.

So, with two weeks to fill my open slot, I started contacting people. One of the first people I contacted was Dan Zeiser, who not only told me, "Sure, I'd be happy to talk," but gave me a choice of several topics! Of course, all the topics had to do with Union General George H. Thomas (OK, that's a joke), but I settled on the Battle of Nashville, in which, happily, 'Old Pap' played a prominent role.

Having Dan as our speaker last month gave me the opportunity to publicly acknowledge Dan's many contributions to the Roundtable. The fact is, there is not much that is good, substantive, or necessary that has happened with the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable over the past 20 years that Dan Zeiser has not had a hand in. He was our group's president in 1997 and helped open club membership to women. (Yes, surprisingly, we were an all male club prior to that.) He has served as editor of the Charger newsletter since 2004 while often writing for it. Each month he handles our meeting reservations and manages most of our dealings with Judson - a task that takes more than a few minutes of time - and serves as quizmaster at meetings. If you get the impression that our organization doesn't exist without Dan Zeiser, you are not far from the truth..

As Dan came to the podium to give his talk he received a well-deserved standing ovation in recognition of his many years of faithful service. It was a fitting tribute and I would like to reiterate here what those in attendance said that night with their long ovation: Thank you, Dan, for all you have done and continue to do for the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable! Well done and huzzah!

Our December speaker is author Nora Titone. Titone's book, *My Thoughts Be Bloody*, published in 2010, describes the complex relationship between John Wilkes Booth and his wealthier, more celebrated, and more accomplished older brother Edwin and makes a convincing case that sibling rivalry was Wilkes's primary motive in killing Abraham Lincoln. It is a wonderful book with an interesting and highly original premise that has received strong critical praise. If you are interested, we will have copies for sale at the December meeting, with proceeds going to the CCWRT.

This is Titone's first book. Prior to publishing it, she worked as a researcher for other historians, most notably, Doris Kearns Goodwin on Goodwin's own Lincoln book, *Team of Rivals*. I see Nora Titone as a future publishing star, one of those few legitimate historians who manages to leap out of the egghead history genre to find a broader, general readership similar to her mentor Goodwin or the estimable David McCullough. Tellingly, Titone appeared with Goodwin this past summer on *The Charlie Rose Show* to discuss *My Thoughts Be Bloody*. How many newly-published historians get that gig? Not many, for sure. (You can see a video of that interview here - <http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/11794>.)

Our December meeting promises to be a good one. I hope to see you there.

Respectfully submitted,
Paul Burkholder

CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE
2011-2012 SCHEDULE

September 14, 2011

***Experiencing
the Civil War***

**Robert
Olmstead**



October 12, 2011

***The Battle of
Monocacy***



Destruction of the RR bridge
over the Monocacy River

Marc Leepson

November 9, 2011

***The Battle of
Nashville***

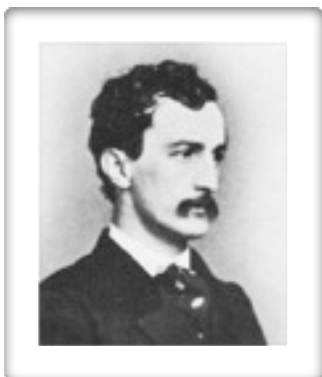
**Dan
Zeiser**



December 14, 2011

***How Sibling
Rivalry Helped
Spawn an
Assassin***

Nora Titone



January 11, 2012

***The Dick Crews Annual Debate:
Lincoln and Douglas Debate***

**Mel Maurer as Abraham Lincoln
Chris Fortunato as Stephen Douglas
Moderator: William F. B. Vodrey**

February 8, 2012

***A. P. Hill
at Gettysburg***

Jon Thompson



March 14, 2012

***The Barlows and
the Gordons***

John Fazio



April 11, 2012

***How Robert E. Lee
Lost the Civil War***

**Edward H.
Bonekemper III**



May 16, 2012 (Note later date)

Vicksburg!

Ed Bearss



HOW DID THE PRESIDENTIAL PARTY GET TO THE THEATER?

By John C. Fazio

There are at least three versions of this.

In the first scenario, Mrs. Lincoln, Major Rathbone, and Miss Harris were told by the President, who was “engaged,” to go on ahead to the theater. Charles Forbes accompanied them to the theater (the carriage presumably being driven by coachman Francis P. Burke) and then returned to the White House for the President. Forbes then accompanied the President to the theater and from the carriage to the box. In this scenario, it is unclear whether Mrs. Lincoln, Rathbone, and Harris waited at the theater for the President to arrive before ascending to the dress circle and the presidential box, or took their places in the box upon arrival, with the President arriving later and being escorted to the presidential box separately.¹ Significantly, for reasons that will become manifest soon enough, in this scenario, Rathbone and Harris are at the White House before the presidential carriage leaves for the theater.

In the second scenario, the President and Mrs. Lincoln left the White House together at approximately 8:10, together with the presidential footman, Charles Forbes, sometimes referred to as the President’s “messenger,” “personal attendant,” “valet,” “servant,” or simply “a White House aide.” Heavily whiskered and bearded, Forbes looked much older than his 30 years, but, unfortunately, his judgment reflected his actual years, not his apparent ones. The carriage was driven by the President’s coachman, Burke, who drove it first to the home of New York Senator Ira Harris to pick up the President’s and Mrs. Lincoln’s guests for the evening. The Senator was the father of Clara Harris and the stepfather of Major Henry Rathbone. Clara and Henry were engaged to be married. They did not accompany the Lincolns from the White House, but were picked up at the Senator’s home and then driven to Ford’s Theatre in the presidential carriage. This scenario is the most commonly accepted one contained in nearly all accounts of the assassination.²



Henry Reed Rathbone

and is

The third scenario has the Lincolns, Rathbone, and Harris all leaving the White House at the same time in the same carriage, without any guard or escort, all arriving at the theater at the same time.³

It seems strange that something as simple and basic as how the presidential party made their way to the theater cannot be known with certainty, but there it is. In any case, let us consider the foregoing scenarios and try for a conclusion.

In my judgment, we may safely disregard at least part of the first version, which is contained in Charles Forbes’s 1892 affidavit. The affidavit attests to other improbabilities, which is not surprising when we consider that it was sworn to 27 years after the fact and, more importantly, that Forbes had an axe to grind, namely, to deny entirely or at least to minimize his culpability in the assassination.⁴ Forbes’s description of doubling back to pick up the President and driving him to the theater separately from the rest of the party is, to my knowledge, found nowhere else in the literature of the subject, which is massive. It seems likely that, as the President’s footman, he must have accompanied the President on many outings to the theater and elsewhere and that he is, therefore, conflating the events of the evening of April 14 with the events of another outing, inasmuch as, on its face, there does not appear to be a self-serving motive in his description of the double-back. It is not as easy to dismiss one of the other two accounts, because both come with strong authority, but dismiss one we must, because they are irreconcilable. Someone has made a mistake, due to a failure of memory, carelessness, or simply repetition of an error or errors of others.

The best original authority for the second scenario is the testimony of Rathbone himself, given at the trial of the conspirators. He said, under oath:

On the evening of the 14th of April last, at about twenty-minutes past eight o'clock, in company with Ms. Harris, I left my residence at the corner of Fifteenth and H Streets, and joined the President and Mrs. Lincoln, and went with them, in their carriage, to Ford's Theatre, on Tenth Street.⁵



United States Senator Ira Harris

So what is the problem? Why do we not simply reject the third scenario and go with Rathbone and what is clearly the majority opinion? First, because the statement "...in company with Miss Harris, I left my residence...and joined the President and Mrs. Lincoln, and went with them in their carriage to Ford's Theatre" can be interpreted to mean that upon leaving his residence he stepped into the carriage, which already had the President and Mrs. Lincoln on board, or can be interpreted to mean that he stepped into the carriage, which was then driven back to the White House for the purpose of joining the Lincolns before being driven to the theatre. Second, because the source of the account, in which they all left together is Noah Brooks, the California journalist who was closer to Lincoln than almost anyone else was, who saw him almost every day in the last two and a half years of the war, and who was there, at the White House, when the presidential party left. He states categorically, in his letter of April 16: "Speaker Colfax and your correspondent were at the house just before he went out for the last time alive...Mrs. Lincoln's carriage was at the door, *seated in it being Miss Harris, daughter of Senator Harris of New York, and Major Rathburn (Rathbone), her step-brother.* The President and wife entered and drove off without any guard or escort." (My

emphasis.)

Further, Forbes's account, otherwise dubious, is consistent with Brooks's account at least as to the guests being at the White House prior to departure. He says: "...I still had it (a picture Tad Lincoln had given him) in my pocket when Mrs. Lincoln *and her guests* were ready to start for the theatre. The President told *them* to go ahead...I accompanied *them* to the theatre..." (My emphasis.) Still further, another very strong source, the literary giant and Lincoln scholar Carl Sandburg, wrote that "In the carriage into which the President and his wife stepped were Henry Reed Rathbone, assigned by Stanton to accompany the President, and his fiancée, Miss Clara Harris...The carriage left the White House with its four occupants, coachman Francis Burns (*sic*) holding the reins, and alongside him the footman and valet, Charles Forbes."⁶ And still further, Clara M. Laughlin, one of the early historians of the assassination, wrote, in 1909, that Mrs. Lincoln, in preparing for the evening, sent word to Miss Harris and Major Rathbone that "the White House carriage would call for (them) a little after eight, and, further, that when the carriage finally left the White House for the theater, "The young sweethearts were in festive mood at the evening's prospect, and the President responded to it with much happiness in their care-free company."⁷ Ms. Laughlin cites as authority for the last quote information given to her directly by Rathbone's and Harris's son, Mr. Henry R. Rathbone Jr. of Chicago, which should nail it down.

For the foregoing and following reasons, I come down on the side of Forbes, Brooks, Sandburg, and Laughlin and against the overwhelming majority of historians of the assassination, who hold for the second scenario.

1. It is less likely that guests of the President of the United States and the First Lady would impose upon them by asking that they be specially called for on the way to the theater, than that they would arrange to be taken to the White House in time for the departure. The evidence shows that it is

probable that the White House sent the presidential carriage (i.e., coachman Burke and Forbes) to pick them up at Clara's father's home and then brought them to the White House in time for everyone to leave together, a scenario that can be interpreted to be consistent with presidential guard Thomas Pendel's account⁸ in addition to the accounts already given. Pendel, after describing a final conversation between the President, Mrs. Lincoln, George Ashmun of Massachusetts, and Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax in the main entrance of the White House, says that "Ned Burke (*sic*) and Charles Forbes, the coachman and footman, respectively, drove over to a private residence, and took in the coach Major Rathbone and Miss Harris, who was the daughter of Senator Ira T. Harris, of New York." Observe that he does not say that the Lincolns were in the coach when it was driven to the Harris home.⁹ While this would explain how the guests got to the White House from Senator Harris's home, it cannot be reconciled with those accounts which have the presidential carriage being driven by the coachman, with Forbes, the President, and Mrs. Lincoln on board, first to Senator Harris's home, to pick up the guests, on the way to the theater.

2. Because Rathbone's testimony is susceptible of two interpretations, it is possible to reconcile it with the third scenario. The testimony may reasonably be interpreted to mean that he and his fiancée left their residence at about 8:20 and joined the President and Mrs. Lincoln *at the White House* and then went with them, in their carriage, to the theater. Some might say that such a construction is tortured, but is it really? The supposition is that, if Rathbone and Harris left for the White House at 8:20, there would be no way the party could have reached the theater by 8:30, which all indications are they did. The supposition, further, is that the President and Mrs. Lincoln left the White House at 8:10, which would get them to Senator Harris's residence at about 8:20 and the theater by 8:30, if we interpret Rathbone's testimony to mean that when he and Clara left her father's home, they stepped into Lincoln's carriage and were then driven directly to the theater with the Lincolns.

The problem with these suppositions is that they are posited on very precise timing, i.e., the carriage leaves the White House at exactly 8:10, it takes exactly 10 minutes to reach Senator Harris's home, it takes exactly 10 more minutes to reach the theater, and it arrives at the theater at exactly 8:30. But we know enough to know that such precision rarely obtains in the real world, and there is sufficient ambiguity in the eyewitness accounts, both as to the time the play began and the time of the arrival of the presidential party, to justify a conclusion that it did not obtain in this case. As an illustration of imprecision in estimates of time, consider the letter written by eyewitness John Downing Jr. on April 26, 1865, in which he says that "shortly after eight, the President, Mrs. Lincoln, Miss Harris...and... Major Rathbone, arrived and took their positions..."¹⁰ Shortly after eight? When almost everyone else says about 8:30?

The greater likelihood is that the carriage left the White House *some time after 8:00*, with the guests on board, and that it arrived at the theater *some time* between then and 8:30, and that by the time the presidential party actually made their way from the carriage into the theater, through the lobby, up to the dress circle, and into their box, it was *about* 8:30. Even if it were 8:20 or 8:40, it would very likely be remembered and recorded as "about 8:30," which fits with most eyewitness accounts.

We may safely conclude, therefore, that the presidential party, consisting of the President, Mrs. Lincoln, Major Henry Rathbone, and Miss Clara Harris, left the White House in the same carriage and at the same time, driven by the President's coachman, Francis P. Burke, and with Charles Forbes, the President's footman, aboard. The presidential carriage was probably used to bring Rathbone and Harris to the White House. The carriage was not accompanied by a military guard or escort when it left the White House.



From left to right: Henry Rathbone, Clara Harris, Mary Todd Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln, and John Wilkes Booth

I opt for this conclusion despite the weight of secondary authority against it because it represents the greater probability. The secondary authority is, I believe, a case of repetition of the mistakes of others and of historical error acquiring a life of its own. To opt for the second scenario is to hold that Noah Brooks, who was at the White House when the carriage left, and Carl Sandburg, a preeminent Lincoln scholar, and Clara M. Laughlin, who wrote what she was told by Rathbone's and Harris's son, erred – a tough row to hoe. It is also to hold that Charles Forbes, in his 1892 affidavit, not only lied about his whereabouts when Booth struck, something he had a motive to lie about, but also lied about the whereabouts of the guests when the carriage left the White House, something he had no motive to lie about. Not likely.

¹ Affidavit sworn to by Charles Forbes, September 17, 1892. Chicago Historical Society; Timothy S. Good, *We Saw Lincoln Shot*, 1995, p. 102.

² Here are just a few: Otto Eisenschiml; *Why Was Lincoln Murdered?* Faber and Faber, London, 1937, p. 32; Harold Holzer, *The President Is Shot*, Boyds Mills Press, 2004, p. 105; Michael W. Kauffman, *American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies*, Random House, 2004, p. 224; Thomas Pendel, *Thirty-Six Years in the White House: A Memoir of the White House Doorkeeper*, Washington: Neale, 1962, p. 40; Anthony Pitch, *They Have Killed Papa Dead!*, Steerforth Press, Hanover, New Hampshire, 2008, p. 106; W. Emerson Reck, *A. Lincoln: His Last 24 Hours*; University of South Carolina Press, 1987, p. 60; George S. Bryan, in *The Great American Myth* (Americana House, Inc., 1940), says: "...we know that no less than five persons saw the President with Mrs. Lincoln in the carriage as it was driven from the Executive Mansion to call for Miss Harris and her fiancée' at Senator Harris' residence (Fifteenth and H Streets)." (p. 224) Regrettably, he does not name them.

³ Michael Burlingame, Ed., *Lincoln Observed: Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, New York and London, 1998, p. 188.

⁴ George S. Bryan, in *The Great American Myth* (op.cit.), refers to Forbes's affidavit as one "whose whole effect is to shake confidence in the man's essential trustworthiness". (p. 224)

⁵ Ben: Perley Moore, *The Conspiracy Trial for the Murder of the President*, Vol. I, p. 192.

⁶ Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and the War Years*, the Readers Digest Association, 1954, 1970, p. 580

⁷ Clara M. Laughlin, *The Death of Lincoln*, Doubleday, Page & Company, 1909, pp. 74, 77.

⁸ Pendel, op.cit., p.40.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 39,40.

¹⁰ Louis A. Warren Library, quoted in Good, op.cit., p. 66.

John Fazio is a former president of the Roundtable. He is a frequent contributor to The Charger.



The theater box where Lincoln was shot



A view inside Ford's Theatre. The box where Lincoln was shot is in the upper center of the photo, bordered by the American flags.



NEXT MONTH

**THE DICK CREWS ANNUAL DEBATE:
LINCOLN AND DOUGLAS DEBATE**

**MEL MAURER AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN
CHRIS FORTUNATO AS STEPHEN DOUGLAS**

MODERATOR: WILLIAM F. B. VODREY

the
Sherman House

www.shermanhouse.org

The Sherman House Museum in Lancaster, Ohio is the birthplace of General William Tecumseh Sherman, his younger brother U.S. Senator John Sherman, and home of the remarkable Sherman family. The Sherman House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Civil War Preservation Trail, and has been a memorial to the family since 1951. It, along with Georgian Museum, is owned and operated by the Fairfield Heritage Association.

The original frame home built in 1811 consists of a parlor/dining room, kitchen, master bedroom, and children's bedroom. The Sherman family added onto the house in 1816, including a parlor and study for (father) Judge Charles Sherman. All of these rooms have been restored to have when the A brick front was 1870 and this furnished almost furniture owned by Sherman when they City after his a parlor set originally Ulysses S. and Julia bedroom houses and another is a re-Sherman's Civil War contains several the war and a sound depicting his passion last room you will excellent exhibit of guns and GAR



look as they would Shermans lived here. added to the house in Victorian parlor is completely with the General and Ellen lived in New York retirement. It includes owned by General Grant. One upstairs family memorabilia creation of General field tent that items he used during and light presentation for the Union. The visit houses an Civil War artifacts, memorabilia.

Ohio's links to the Civil War

These are some of the places you can visit or view historical markers to learn more about Ohio's role in the Civil War. To see more, go to ohiocivilwar150.org or to remarkableohio.org

- 1 Soldiers and Sailors Monument**
Public Square, Cleveland
Honors Ohio's role in the Civil War.

- 2 Camp Cleveland**
Industry Park, W. 11th St. and University Road, Cleveland
Thousands of Union troops trained for battle here.

- 3 Grays Armory**
1234 Bolivar Rd., Cleveland
Headquarters of the Cleveland Grays, among the first Cleveland troops sent into battle.

- 4 Woodland Cemetery**
Cleveland
Burial site for Civil War soldiers.

- 5 Western Reserve Historical Society**
10825 East Blvd., Cleveland

- 6 American Civil War Museum of Ohio**
217 S. Washington St., Tiffin

- 7 Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center**

Hayes and Buckland avenues, Fremont
Hayes was a major general in the war, wounded five times.



Hayes

- 8 Johnson's Island**
Marblehead
Prisoner-of-war camp, Confederate cemetery.

- 9 103rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry Museum**
5501 East Lake Road, Sheffield Lake
Regiment had volunteers from Cuyahoga, Lorain and Medina counties.

- 10 James A. Garfield National Historic Site**

Mentor
Union officer and later president.



Garfield

- 11 McCook House**
Public Square, Carrollton



Home of the "Fighting McCooks," more than a dozen members of same family who fought for the Union.

- 12 Custer Memorial**

46320 Cadiz-Junction Rd., Hopedale
Statue at site of birthplace of George Armstrong Custer, Civil War general and ill-fated Indian fighter.



Custer

- 13 Ripley House**
625 High St., Worthington
Birthplace of Roswell Sabin Ripley, who was a general in the

Confederate army.

- 14 Camp Chase**
2900 Sullivant Ave., Columbus
Training and prison camp, Confederate cemetery.

- 15 Sherman House Museum**

137 E. Main St., Lancaster
Birthplace of Union Gen. William T. Sherman.



Sherman

- 16 Johnny Clem Statue**
Newark
"Drummer Boy of Chickamauga."

- 17 The Sheridan Monument**

Somerset
Honors Union Gen. Philip H. Sheridan.



Sheridan

- 18 Butler County Soldiers, Sailors & Pioneers Monument**

Monument Avenue at the High Street Bridge, Hamilton
Houses collection of Civil War weapons, and art glass windows depict scenes from the war.

- 19 Spring Grove Cemetery**
4521 Spring Grove Ave., Cincinnati

More than 40 Civil War generals, along with Union and Confederate soldiers, are buried there.

- 20 National Underground Railroad Freedom Center**

50 East Freedom Way, Cincinnati

- 21 Harriet Beecher Stowe House**

2950 Gilbert Ave., Cincinnati
Residence of influential anti-slavery author, who wrote "Uncle Tom's Cabin."



Stowe

- 22 Ulysses S. Grant Birthplace**

Point Pleasant
Civil war general and president. Also Grant Boyhood Home, Georgetown.



Grant

- 23 Battle of Buffington Island**

Marker and park on Ohio 124 at Portland
Marks only significant Civil War battle in Ohio when Union troops defeated Confederate cavalry column led by Gen. John Morgan.

SOURCES: Ohio Historical Society; Plain Dealer research

WRITTEN BY BRIAN ALBRECHT, GRAPHIC BY KEID BROWN THE PLAIN DEALER