

THE CHARGER

September, 2000

380 Meeting

Vol.22 #1

Tonight's Speaker:



Shelby Foote

Shelby Foote was born in 1916 in Greenville, Mississippi. After Greenville High School he attended the University of North Carolina along with novelist and journalist Walker Percy.

Through his friendship with Percy, Foote met William Faulkner and Carl Sandburg.

Then along came World War II in which Foote served as a Captain of artillery in the European theater. Following the War he worked for Associated Press for a few years then published his first novel *Tournament* in 1949.

His next books were *Follow me Down* (1950) and *Love in a dry Season* (1951). The stories were set in the deep South. But it was his book *Shiloh* (1952) that bought him attention and critical acclaim. The book was a fictional re-creation of the Civil War battle of Shiloh.

-Continued on Page 4-

TOP 5 CIVIL WAR BOOKS

ACCORDING TO A SURVEY BY
CIVIL WAR INTERACTIVE.COM

1. THE CIVIL WAR TRILOGY
SHELBY FOOTE
2. KILLER ANGELS
MICHAEL SHAARA
3. BATTLE CRY OF FREEDOM
JAMES MCPHERSON
4. THE GETTYSBURG CAMPAIGN
EDWIN CODDINGTON
5. STILLNESS AT APPOMATTOX
BRUCE CATTON

("GONE WITH THE WIND" WAS 24TH)

Date: September 13, 2000

Place: The Cleveland
Playhouse Club
8501 Carnegie Ave.



Time: Drinks 6 PM

Dinner 6:30 PM

Reservations: Please Call
JAC Communications
at (216) 861-5588
(plus your meal choice)

See page 2 for details of tonight's meeting

Shelby Foote's Visit:

The Western Reserve Historical Society is cosponsoring Shelby Foote's speech with the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable. We'll meet at 6 pm at the Play House Club and Mr. Foote will dine with us there. He will speak in the Norton Room at the WRHS at 8:30 pm. Up to 150 Roundtable members and guests will receive free admission to the WRHS and its yearlong Civil War exhibit that evening, and are guaranteed seating in the Norton Room. Any overflow guests, either from the Roundtable or the general public, will be seated in the Crawford Auto Museum adjoining the WRHS, which will have a live audio-visual feed of Mr. Foote's speech. I regret to inform our membership that, as a matter of policy, Mr. Foote declines to autograph any of his books.

William Vodrey

About the

Cleveland Civil War Roundtable

The 127 men and women of the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable reflect the ethnic, racial, and religious diversity of Greater Cleveland. Members range in age from 17 to 94 years old. The common bond is the belief that the American Civil War was the *defining* event in United States history.

Dinner meetings are normally held on the second Wednesday of each month, September through May. The Roundtable meets at a private club of the Cleveland Playhouse 8501 Carnegie Ave. near the Cleveland Clinic.

Dinner is \$20.00. Club dues are \$40.00 per year.

—Membership information (800) 800-8310—

Cleveland Civil War Roundtable Presidents

2000 Bob Boyda	1978 Richard McCrae
1999 Dick Crews	1977 James Chapman
1998 John Moore	1976 Milton Holmes
1997 Dan Zeiser	1975 Thomas Gretter
1996 John Sutula	1974 Nolan Heidelbaugh
1995 Norton London	1973 Arthur Jordan
1994 Robert E. Battisti	1972 Bernard Drews
1993 Kevin Callahan	1971 Kenneth Callahan
1992 Bob Baucher	1970 Frank Schuhle
1991 Joe Tirpak	1969 Donald Heckaman
1990 Ken Callahan Jr.	1968 Frank Moran
1989 Neil Glaser	1967 William Schlesinger
1988 Martin Graham	1966 Donald Hamill
1987 George Vourlojianis	1965 Lester L. Swift
1986 Tim Beatty	1964 Guy DiCarlo, Jr.
1985 Brian Kowell	1963 Paul Guenther
1984 Neil Evans	1962 Edward Downer
1983 William Victory	1961 Charles Clarke
1982 John Harkness	1960 Howard Preston
1981 Thomas Geschke	1959 John Cullen, Jr.
1980 Charles Spiegle	1958 George Farr, Jr.
1979 William Bates	1957 Kenneth Grant

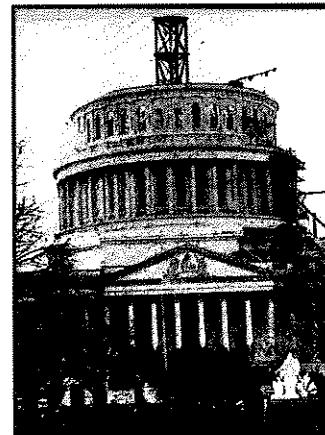
CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

(800)800-8310 email RCrews5369@aol.com

President: William Vodrey
Vice President: Bill McGrath
Secretary: Lou Braman
Treasurer: Bill Doty

Executive Committee:

Manard Bauer
Bob Boyda
Dick Crews
Ty Somersshield
Dale Thomas
Dan Zeiser



Unfinished Capital Building
Lincoln's Inauguration, March 4, 1861

2000 Field Trip

Washington, D.C.

September 28, to Oct. 1, 2000

**CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE
2000/2001 SCHEDULE**

September 13, 2000



The Novelist
as Historian

Shelby Foote

October 11, 2000



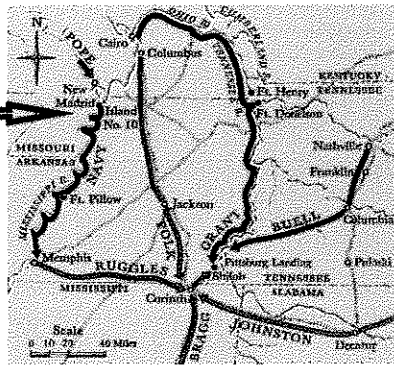
African-American
Troops in the
Civil War

Noah Andre Trudeau

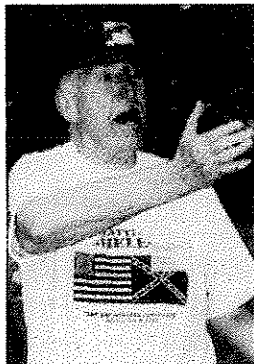
November 8, 2000

Island No.
10

**Brian
Kowell**



December 6, 2000



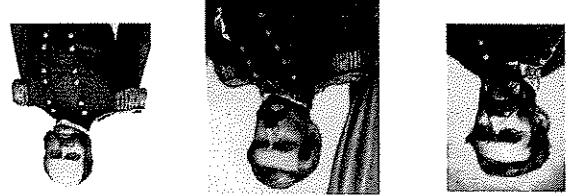
The Battle of Shiloh

Ed Bearss

January 10, 2001

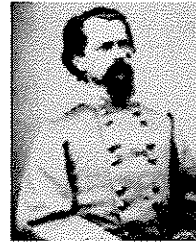
The Great Debate:
The absolutely worst general of the War

Moderator: Dick Crews



(Some good candidates from a long list of prospects)

February 14, 2001



Gen. John B. Gordon

Warrior & Survivor

Bob Boyda

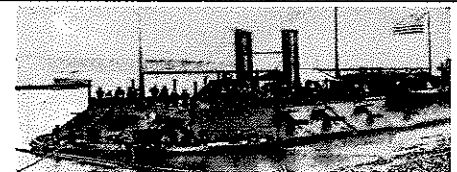
March 14, 2001



The Life
of the Common Soldier

**The 51st Ohio Volunteer
Infantry, Co. B**

April 11, 2001



"Infernal Machines"
and the sinking of the USS Cairo

Bill McGrath

May 9, 2001



An Evening
with General
William T. Sherman

E. Chris Evans

Membership in the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable is open to everyone with an interest in the American Civil War and its period in United States history. Call (800) 800-8310, email: rcrews5369@aol.com, or visit our web site <http://members.aol.com/rcrews5369>.

Tonight's speaker: Shelby Foote

(Continued from page 1)

While working on his next book *Jordan County* (1954) Foote received a letter from the well known publisher Bennett Cerf (TV Show: *What's my Line?*). Cerf asked Foote to write a book on the history of the Civil War. A book of "two hundred thousand words would be fine" said the publisher.

The book or really three books, *The Civil War Trilogy* took twenty years to complete. The three books are *Fort Sumter to Perryville* (1958), *Fredericksburg to Meridian* (1963), and *Red River to Appomattox* (1974).



"The Civil War defined us as what we are and it opened us to being what we became, good and bad things. And it is very necessary, if you're going to understand the American character in the twentieth century, to learn about this enormous catastrophe of the mid-nineteenth century. It was a crossroads of our being, and it was a hell of a crossroads."

Shelby Foote

While writing and researching **The Civil War Trilogy** for twenty years Foote was a novelist/lecturer at the University of Virginia and a playwright-in-residence in Washington, D.C. Then in 1977 he returned to novelist with his book, *September September*.

Shelby Foote in 1990 was a consultant and appeared in the Ken Burns nine part PBS special on the Civil War.

Shelby is a resident of Memphis, Tennessee. We are sure he was just as outraged as we were over the recent defacing of the statue of Nathan Bedford Forrest* in Memphis.

The Cleveland Civil War Roundtable which had Bruce Catton as a speaker in our first year of 1957/1958 welcomes Shelby Foote.

• We have since learned that the Memphis Park Commission has cleaned off the spray paint graffiti and restored the Nathan Bedford Forrest statue to its original condition. Also note that Nathan Bedford Forrest's boy hood home at Chapel Hill, Tennessee (40 miles south of Nashville) is being restored and is open to the public. For more information on Forrest: www.nbforrest.org.



JOHN C. BRECKINRIDGE

HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN HANGED

By Dick CREWS

Students of the American Civil War know that only one man in the Civil War was hanged for war crimes: Henry Wirz. He was the commandant of the *Andersonville* confederate prison. Over thirteen thousand Union prisoners of war died in *Andersonville*. Some have argued that even though Wirz was inept he had very little control because the lack of food was the underlying cause of the disease that killed so many Union prisoners. The Confederacy could not feed its own troops let alone the tens of thousands of Union prisoners it held.

John C. Breckinridge is a very different story: A well known Senator from Kentucky; Presidential candidate against Abraham Lincoln in 1860; And Vice President of the United States from 1857 to 1861.

He joined the Confederacy in late 1861. He served as a confederate field general most of the war. Originally he was to head just Kentucky troops but as the War went on he was a corps. commander of units from many Southern States. He fought in most of the major battles: Shiloh, Corinth, Winchester, Baton Rouge, Stones River, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, and Cold Harbor. His greatest victory was at New Market, Virginia in the Shenandoah Valley. His greatest defeat, which led to his downfall as a battle field commander, was at Missionary Ridge, Chattanooga. It was his line that George Thomas's Union troops broke at Missionary Ridge to cause the Confederates to flee in confusion. Breckinridge was not there at the time but at Lookout Mountain fighting Joe Hooker's troops. His superior Braxton Bragg was on Missionary Ridge but could not stop the Confederate collapse. However typical Braxton Bragg, he blamed the defeat on Breckinridge being drunk.

Breckinridge then commanded a small confederate force in Southwest Virginia. In February of 1865 he was sent to Richmond to head the War Department. He was very qualified to be Secretary of War but soon the confederacy would collapse.

Breckinridge fled south with Jefferson Davis and the other cabinet members. He separated from Davis in Georgia and made his escape through Florida to Cuba.

Breckinridge spent the next four years with his wife and children in Europe and Canada. He lived much of the time in *Niagara on the Lake, Ontario* across the river from the United States. He could look across the Niagara River and see the U. S. flag flying over Fort Niagara.

In the Spring of 1869 he returned to his beloved Kentucky. His return was made possible by President Andrew Johnson issuing a general amnesty for ex-confederates on December 25, 1868. This was clearly intended for Breckinridge since he was the highest profile confederate still-at-large.

President Johnson did not have the constitutional authority to issue a amnesty to John C. Breckinridge. The United States Constitution only defines one crime: **Treason**. The Constitution defines *aiding and abetting the enemy* as treason. Since Breckinridge with Jubal Early lead an confederate attack on Washington in the summer of 1864, there can be no doubt that he was guilty of treason.

The United States executed Germans and Japanese for war crimes following World War II but in 1869 let John C. Breckinridge, a treasonous Vice President of the United States, go home unpunished.

The crime was too great. He should have been hanged.

Dick Crews

The hanging of Henry Wirz,
November 10, 1865.

Was the wrong man hanged?



"The War that Never Was: Britain, the U.S. and the Trent Affair"

by William F.B. Vodrey
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They say it never rains, it pours. And just when the United States was locked in a deadly struggle with the Confederacy, just when the military picture was at its bleakest, just when Abraham Lincoln's desk was piled highest, it looked very likely that Great Britain - the mightiest empire on the face of the Earth - would, for the third time in ninety years, wage war against us. Fortunately, it didn't happen. A conflict spanning the Atlantic was averted, and the U.S.-British war of 1861 became the war that never was.

By the fall of 1861, the Confederacy looked like it had a real chance to succeed. There had been victories at Ft. Sumter, at Bull Run, Big Bethel, Carthage, Wilson's Creek and Ball's Bluff, and more were in the offing. But Confederate President Jefferson Davis knew that if his new nation was to be assured of survival, powerful friends across the seas would be invaluable. He dispatched two diplomats, James M. Mason of Virginia and John Slidell of Louisiana, to be Confederate commissioners, or envoys. Mason and Slidell were to go to Britain and France, respectively. These were the military and economic superpowers of the day. Davis knew his history: French and Dutch help had been key to American success in the Revolution; now, perhaps, foreign assistance would help win Southern independence.

Mason and Slidell were originally to leave aboard the newly-refitted warship C.S.S. Nashville but, when the U.S. Navy got wind of the scheme and posted four warships to stop it, they left instead aboard a blockade runner and former privateer, the Gordon (also sometimes called the Theodora), on a \$10,000 charter. They snuck out from Charleston harbor after 1 a.m. on October 12, 1861 under cover of a heavy downpour. Their mission was no secret, although when and how they'd leave Southern shores was supposed to be.

Five days later the Gordon put Mason and Slidell ashore at Cardenas, Cuba, and they took a train to Havana. The island of Cuba was at the time still part of the Spanish Empire, another European power remaining neutral in the Civil War but leaning a bit towards the Confederacy. In Havana, Mason and Slidell were wined and dined by the diplomatic community before transferring to a British mail steamer, the Trent, to continue their voyage to Europe.

However, patrolling off the Cuban coast was the steam sloop U.S.S. San Jacinto, commanded by Charles Wilkes. Wilkes had already made a name for himself



John Slidell

A native New Yorker and a Columbia University graduate failed in business in New York and established a law practice in New Orleans. Before he became a confederate diplomat, he was an influential Democratic Congressman and Senator from Louisiana.

as according to historian Jay Monaghan, it was "a success partly marred by a [U.S. Navy] court-martial held after his return on charges [filed] by his disgruntled companions.

When he learned of the presence of Mason and Slidell on Cuban soil, Wilkes met with his officers to discussing them. His first officer, Lt. Donald M. Fairfax, advised against it. Noting that Americans had fought the War of 1812 in part because the British (ironically enough) had done just what Wilkes was now proposing to do - stop a neutral ship and remove, at gunpoint, those he wished.

Fairfax didn't change Wilkes's mind, though. On his own authority and without orders, he decided to stop the Trent and capture her Confederate passengers. On November 7, 1861, Wilkes intercepted the unarmed Trent in the Old Bahamas Channel, 300 miles east of Havana. He hoisted the Stars and Stripes and twice fired warning shots over her bow, forcing her to halt.

By coincidence, the trans-Atlantic telegraph cable was out of commission at the time of Mason and Slidell's capture, and it was nearly two weeks before the Trent arrived in England, bringing news of the incident. The British government was furious when it learned, on November 28, the full story of the illegal seizure. Lord Palmerston, the Prime Minister, told his Cabinet, "You may stand for this, but [I'll be] damned if I will!" The British monarch, Queen Victoria, shared Palmerston's outrage. "I have never seen so intense a feeling of indignation in my life," A senior American diplomat in London wrote that Mason and Slidell's seizure would "do more for the Southerners than ten victories, for it touches John Bull's honor, and the honor of his flag" (John Bull was the symbol of Britain at the time, much as Uncle Sam was and is of the U.S.).

Obviously Lincoln watched every word that might be used against him by his enemies at home, who suspected that he planned to turn loose the prisoners. At the same time he left an open passage for retreat with honor if popular sentiment were sufficiently to permit him to do so. Had he said definitely that he would hold the commissioners it would have amounted to an ultimatum to England, and had he said definitely that he would return them he would have lost power at home. Only a few intimates noted Lincoln's guarded words, his hope for the cooling influence of time. Most of the people raged at what they called his indecision. Later they called it masterly intuition.

After some stalling, Lincoln decided to find a peaceful way out of the Trent crisis. "One war at a time," he is said to have remarked. In Cabinet meetings on Christmas Day and the day after, 1861, his administration adopted a face-saving compromise; Mason and Slidell would be released, but the U. S. would stand by its right to have arrested them in the first place. Seward briefed senior members of Congress, none of whom were delighted with the decision, but all of whom understood it.

The crisis was over as Heam wrote, "The United States had lost face, but the Confederacy had lost her best opportunity for European intervention. During the balance of the war no other issue brought Great Britain so close to war." The U.S. had also obeyed international law, much to its credit; virtually any objective observer would agree that Capt. Wilkes had acted illegally in seizing diplomatic envoys from a neutral ship bound for a neutral port. The Trent incident and its peaceful resolution by no means ended the threat of foreign intervention in the war.

Still, the risk of foreign intervention was never as great as it was immediately after the Trent incident.



*"One war at a time,"
said Abraham Lincoln*

William Vodrey

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Thank you all for your encouragement and votes over the past year. I look forward to a fine year together with you in 2000-2001. My goals include building our memberships; providing enjoyable and informative monthly meetings; updating our membership directory; getting nonprofit tax-exempt status for the Roundtable; and having distinctive Roundtable lapel pins made. If you'd like to help with any of these projects, please let me know.

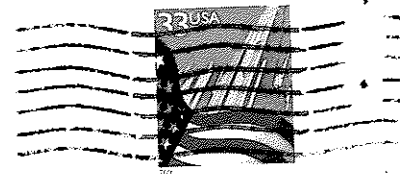
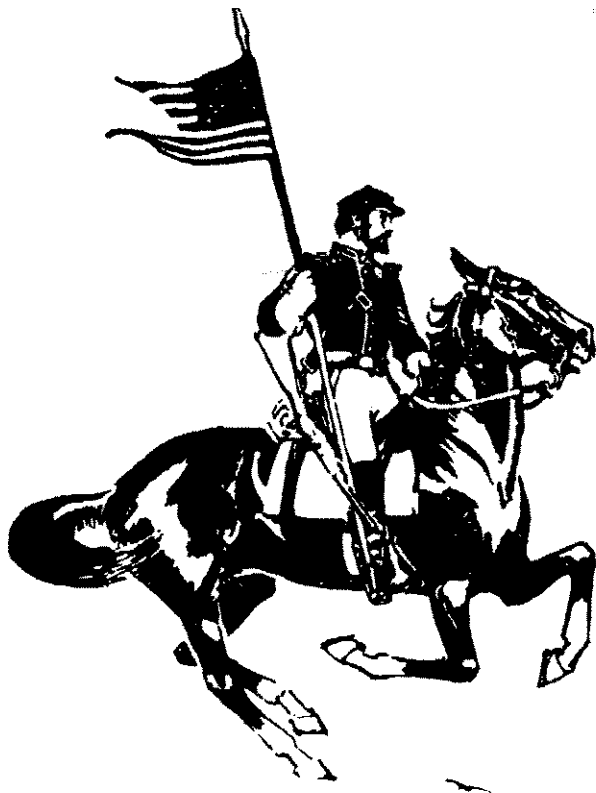
Our year begins with a speech by noted author and Civil War historian Shelby Foote, a star of Ken Burns's landmark PBS series "The Civil War." I want to thank Dr. Kenneth R. Callahan and Mr. Evan Corns, and an anonymous Roundtable member, for their generous funding help, as well as the Western Reserve Historical Society (WRHS) for co-sponsoring Mr. Foote's appearance. Mr. Foote will speak at the WRHS at 8:30 pm. Be sure to make your reservations early with JAC Communications (216) 861-5588 for dinner at the Play House Club; the first 150 members and guests will be admitted free to the WRHS 10825 East Blvd. Cleveland, Ohio museum that evening.

Our Washington, D.C. field trip from Thursday, Sept. 28 to Sunday, Oct. 1 is coming together well, and I hope to see you then, too.

This is your Roundtable, and your officers and I are always interested in your suggestions on improving it.

With best wishes to all my fellow Roundtable members,

WILLIAM VODREY
President, CCWRT



Daniel G. Zeiser
5877 Williamsburg Drive
Cleveland, OH 44143

Cleveland Civil War Roundtable PO Box 18900 Cleveland, OH 44118

So **Shelby Foote** who won the Civil War?



"I can tell you who lost it—the South lost the war. But I'm not sure anybody won that war. It's a tragedy. The Centennial was called a celebration that should have been a time of mourning. but there's some truth to it: the homogenization of our society, and the really cruel follow-through of Reconstruction.

Before the war, it was said, "The United States are ..."

Grammatically, it was spoken that way and thought of as a collection of independent states. After the war, it was always "The United States is .. ."—as we say today without being self-conscious at all. And that sums up what the war accomplished. It made us an "is."

From THE CIVIL WAR AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

SHELBY FOOTE
SEPTEMBER 13, 2000