

THE CHARGER

CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUND-TABLE

P.O. BOX 18900, CLEVELAND, OHIO 44118

OCTOBER 1995

336TH MEETING

VOL. 17 #2

DATE: Wednesday, October 11, 1995

PLACE: The Hermit Club

SUBJECT: "A Taste of Purgatory;
the Story of Johnson's
Island Prison."

SPEAKER:

Mr. Donald Breen
Co-author of a booklet
published by the Ohio
Historical Society en-
titled "Ohio's Military
Prisons of the Civil War",
Mr. Breen is retired from
teaching and lives in
Amherst, Ohio. He is a
graduate of Defiance
College and earned his
M.A. in history from
Kent State University.



TIME: Drinks 6PM Dinner 7PM

THE DEADLINE, JOHNSON'S ISLAND

RESERVATIONS:

Please call JAC Buisness Communications
at 861-5588. RESERVATIONS ARE A MUST!

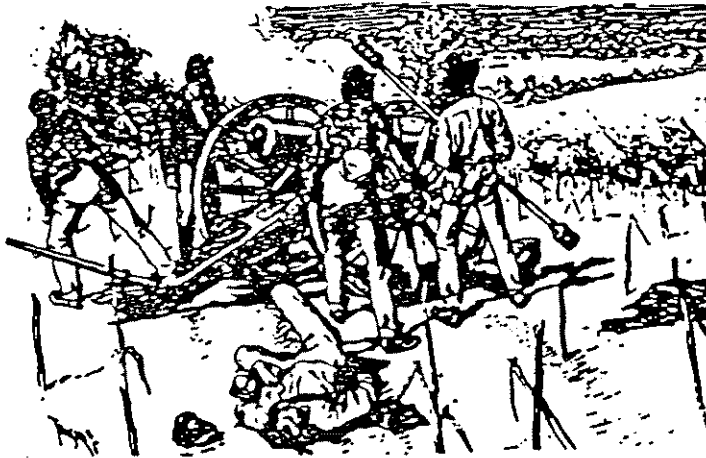


COLD QUARTERS, JOHNSON'S ISLAND

*lived in the
area since the
end of U.S.
History*

CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUND-TABLE

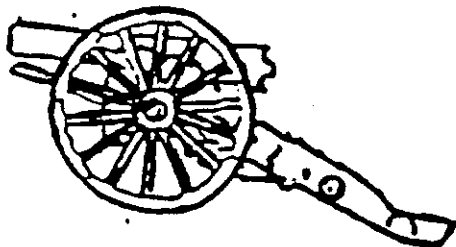
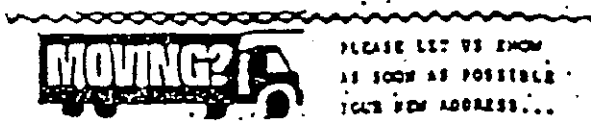
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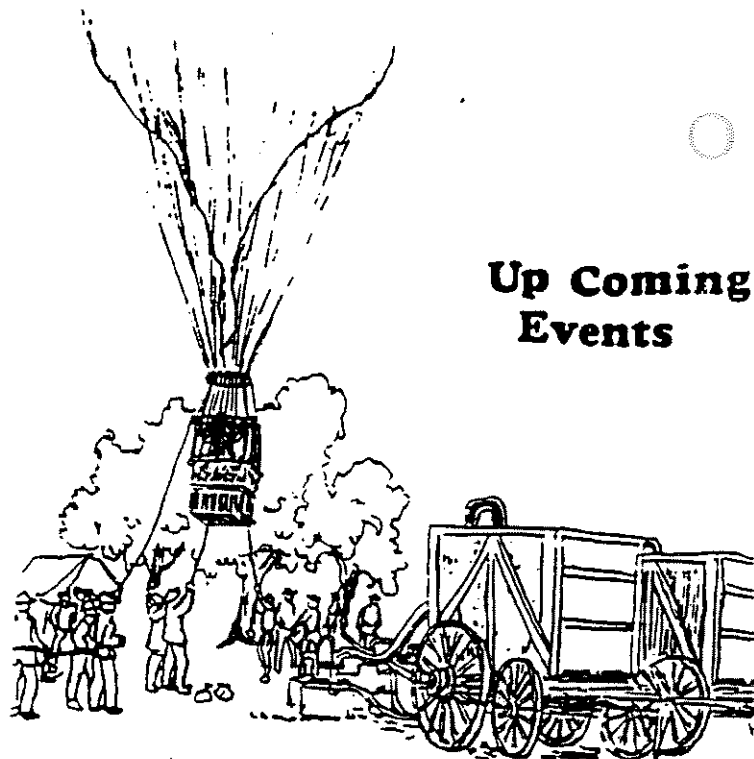
Editorial Office

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Preserve Your Battlefields

Up Coming Events



NEXT YEAR'S SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS & SPEAKERS

- November 8 - Frank Mercante - "Custer"
- December 13 - William McGrath - "Civil War Navy"
- January 10 - Quiz - prepared by Kevin Casey
- February 14 - Hugh Ernhardt - "Lincoln"
- March 13 - Panel Discussion - "Opportunities Lost" Bob Boyda moderator
- April 10 - Jeffery Wert - "Custer"
- May 8 - Ladies Night - William A. Young, "Rev. Findley at Pickett's Charge"



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Arlington House is the former home of Robert E. Lee.

Arlington plans for growth irk Lee's admirers

By ANNE GEARAN

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ARLINGTON, Va. — Before Arlington National Cemetery was a burial ground for soldiers and a slain president, southerners venerated the land as Robert E. Lee's home, the spot where he cast his lot with the Confederacy.

Lee's hilltop mansion, Arlington House, is ringed on three sides by rows of simple white headstones. And now that the cemetery is running out of ground for new graves, a plan to use a small park behind the house has rankled many Lee admirers, historians and mansion tour guides.

"I think it is most unfortunate and sad," said Elizabeth Shearer, a volunteer guide who for 30 years has led school children on educational tours through the mansion.

"It will do away with the beauty of the place. We're trying to show how people lived in 1861, and you didn't have all the trees cut down at that time."

The United States' best-known military cemetery was born of Union soil. How better to snub the South than to bury Yankee soldiers on the lawn of Lee's plantation, reasoned Union Gen. Montgomery Meigs. Meigs and his only son, who was killed in battle in the Shenandoah Valley, are buried there together.

Today 245,000 veterans or their families are buried at the cemetery.

Unless the cemetery acquires more land, it will run out of grave space in 2025. Already family members are buried one coffin atop another.

Veterans could choose other cemeteries, and will have to when Arlington is full, said Arlington superintendent John C. Metzler Jr.

"But there's only one Arlington," he said. "The inevitable will happen someday. But it is my job to postpone that day as long as possible."

In February, the Park Service and the Army, which operates the cemetery, signed an agreement that would transfer about 12 acres of the Arlington House grounds to the cemetery. The plan — which would allow burials to continue for about five more years — requires environmental studies and congressional ap-

The Army has promised to conduct an archaeological study before taking the land, and anything of true value, including the oldest trees, would be saved, Metzler said.

That's of little comfort to Shearer. She says too much history would be destroyed for what is only a short-term fix to the Arlington grave shortage.

All that remains of the Arlington House grounds as the Lees knew them is a steep ravine with 200-year-old trees behind the mansion, Shearer said.

Arlington House was built in 1817 by George Washington Parke Custis, the adopted grandson of George Washington.

Custis' granddaughter, Mary Custis, inherited the 1,100-acre estate. After marrying Lee in 1831, the couple lived there for 30 years. Six of their seven children were born there.

Lee once wrote to a cousin that at Arlington House "my affections and attachments are more strongly placed than at any other place in the world."

In April 1861, Lee faced a wrenching choice. He knew that if he fought for Virginia and the South, his house would be vulnerable to seizure by federal troops.

"And he knew if he left, he probably would not come back," said Frank Cucurullo, a National Park Service historian at Arlington House.

Virginia seceded from the Union on April 17. On April 20, in an upstairs bedroom at Arlington House, Lee wrote a letter resigning his U.S. Army commission.

In a letter to a friend, Mrs. Lee wrote that her husband had "wept tears of blood over this terrible war, but as a man of honor and as a Virginian, he must follow the destiny of his state."

Union troops took Arlington House a month later. The Lees, who spent the war years in Richmond, Va., never set foot in it again.

Mrs. Lee was bitter at losing the mansion, but Lee, by all accounts, accepted it philosophically.

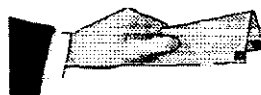
Even in his lifetime, the cemetery began to be a symbol of healing rather than division, Metzler said. Confederate dead were reburied there after the war, with Union soldiers, including 2,111 unknown Union soldiers buried in a common grave.

"Lee's motto was basically, 'Let the past be but the past,'" said Taylor Sanders, historian at Washington & Lee University, where Lee taught after the war and where he is buried.

"He also believed that although we should look forward, it is history that teaches us to hope."

WALKING THE WALK

Preservation of Civil War battlefields and other memorable sites is and always will be an effort that depends for its successes upon the contributions of Civil War help, here are some addresses of you. Let me suggest that before sending information to determine that their objectives in battlefield preservation are the same as yours. (SS)



Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites, Inc. (APCWS)
P.O. Box 1862
Fredericksburg VA 22402
[Malvern Hill and many others]

Battlefield Preservation Alliance
P.O. Box 80
Joppa MD 21085
[Malvern Hill, Winchester, others]

Battle of Nashville Preservation Society
P.O. Box 121796
Nashville TN 37212

Belle Boyd House Fund
Berkeley County Historical Society
P.O. Box 1624
Martinsburg WV 25401

Bentonville Battleground Historical Ass'n.
P.O. Box 432
Newton Grove NC 28366

Blue and Gray Education Society
3510 Highway 29N
Danville VA 24540
[battlefield interpretation at Port Republic, McDowell, others]

Brandy Station Foundation
Box 165
Brandy Station VA 22714

Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation
P.O. Box 229
Middletown VA 22646

Central Maryland Heritage League, Inc.
P.O. Box 721
Middletown MD 21769
[South Mountain]

The Civil War Trust
1225 Eye St.
Washington DC 20005

The Conservation Fund
1800 N. Kent St., Suite 1120
Arlington VA 22209

Fort Benton Fund
% Wayne County Historical Society
Rt. 2, Box 2609
Piedmont MO 63957

Franklin Heritage Foundation
P.O. Box 723
Franklin TN 37064

Friends of Kennesaw Mountain Park
900 Kennesaw Mountain Road
Kennesaw GA 30144

Friends of Monocacy Battlefield
P.O. Box 4101
Frederick MD 21705

Friends of the National Parks at Gettysburg
P.O. Box 4622, 10 Lincoln Square
Gettysburg PA 17325

Gettysburg Battlefield Preservation Ass'n.
P.O. Box 1863
Gettysburg PA 17325

Grant Memorial Association
1020 Schapiro Hall
805-15 West 115th St.
New York NY 10025

HERITAGEPAC
Box 7281
Little Rock AR 72217
[A national non-profit Civil War lobby]

Historical Society of Montgomery County
1654 DeKalb St.
Norristown PA 19401
[W. S. Hancock grave]

Immortal Six Hundred Memorial fund
P.O. Box 652
Sparta GA 30187
[Confederate cemetery marker, Fort Pulaski]

J.E.B. Stuart Birthplace, Inc.
P.O. Box 240
Ararat VA 24053

John Brown Heritage Association
709 Terrace St.
Meadville PA 16335

Johnson's Island Preservation Society
P.O. Box 1865
Johnson's Island OH 43440

Joshua L. Chamberlain House Restoration
Pejepscot Historical Society
159 Park Row
Brunswick ME 04011

Longstreet Memorial Fund
P.O. Box 1896
Raleigh NC 27602
[Longstreet monument at Gettysburg]

McGavock Confederate Cemetery
% Franklin Memorial Association
P.O. Box 1641
Murfreesboro TN 37133

Mill Springs Battlefield Association
P.O. Box 814
Somerset KY 42502

Monnet Battle of Westport Fund
1130 Westport Rd.
Kansas City MO 64111

National Museum of Civil War Medicine
48 E. Patrick St., P.O. Box 470
Frederick MD 21705

Olustee Battlefield Citizens Support Org.
P.O. Box 382
Glen St. Mary FL 32040

Philadelphia Brigade/Pickett's Division Ass'n.
RR1, Box 1E
Blackstone VA 23824
[Preservation at High Water mark at Gettysburg]

Rich Mountain Battlefield Foundation
P.O. Box 227
Beverly WV 26253

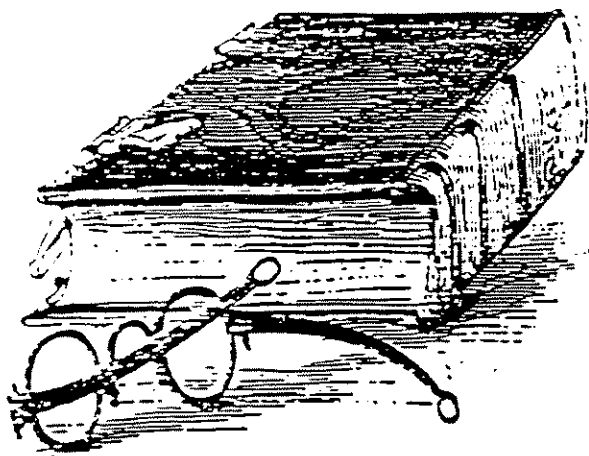
Sailor's Creek Preservation Committee
10322 Reed Rock Road
Amelia VA 23002

Save Historic Antietam foundation
P.O. Box 550
Sharpsburg MD 21782

South Carolina Battleground Preservation
P.O. Box 12441
James Island SC 29422

Southern Memorial Fund
%National Woman's Relief Corps
629 S. 7th St.
Springfield IL 62703
[Memorial Day wreaths at Union cemeteries in the South]

BOOK REVIEW



OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

After the death of his father, William Tecumseh Sherman was raised by the politically prominent Ewing clan of Lancaster, Ohio.

Author gives only half-drawn Sherman portrait

CITIZEN SHERMAN. By Michael Fellman. Random House, 486 pp., \$23.

By ALLAN PESKIN

About halfway through this biography of William Tecumseh Sherman, the meaning of its title becomes clear.

At that point in the narrative, when the reader might reasonably expect to find a detailed exposition of Sherman's military exploits, there is instead virtual silence.

The campaign for Atlanta is brushed off in a few paragraphs. Chickasaw Bayou isn't even mentioned, and the Battle of Shiloh is discussed only in regard to the impact it had on Sherman's self-esteem.

True to his title, biographer Michael Fellman, of Canada's Simon Fraser University, is less interested in describing Sherman the soldier than Sherman the citizen.

This is not conventional military biography but a psychological portrait of a man who, at times, happened to be a warrior.

Sherman is certainly fair game for psychological analysis. Shunted off at the age of 9 to live with relatives after his father's sudden death, he was raised by the politically prominent Ewing clan of Lancaster, Ohio.

Deserted by his own family, never feeling fully accepted into his foster home, Sherman grew up, according to Fellman, nervous and insecure, traits that were intensified by his string of failures in the Army and the business world during the antebellum years.

Marriage to his foster sister, Ellen, an obsessively religious Catholic, added to his psychic burdens. Little wonder that he had to be removed from his first independent command in the

BOOK REVIEW

'Citizen Sherman'

Civil War on suspicion of insanity (a condition Fellman diagnoses as clinical depression).

Subsequent military success brought fame but not happiness. Fellman portrays the post-war Sherman as a quarrelsome, egotistical philanderer, who was cold to his wife and unlucky with his children, one of whom died young and another who betrayed his father's hopes by becoming a Catholic priest.

In addition to all this, Sherman is also judged guilty of all manner of current-day sins: white supremacist, male chauvinist, Indian killer, patriot and sexual harasser.

Readers not yet jaded with the military side of the Civil War are advised to turn elsewhere, most particularly to Lloyd Lewis' 1932 classic, "Sherman, Fighting Prophet," or to last year's "Sherman" by John E. Marszalek.

There, one will find not only a fuller description of Sherman's military career but also a more sympathetic portrait of Sherman the man.

This current entry, for all its psychological acuity, presents only half of the Sherman story.

The man who helped save the Union yet who also bequeathed to future generations the terrible legacy of total war, is too important a figure to be reduced to a case study of a maladjusted personality.

Peskin, who teaches history at Cleveland State University, is the author of a biography of James A. Garfield.

MORE THAN YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT

WILLIAM C. OATES



Even before the Civil War, the world of William Calvin Oates was filled with hardship, turmoil, and violence. He was born on December 1, 1835 in Pike County, Alabama, the son of William and Sarah Oates. The family lived in extreme poverty. Education was considered a luxury, and young William had little opportunity to attend the local common school, though occasionally he did show up there for two or three months at a time. Raised on the untamed frontier, Oates learned most of his early lessons about life outside the classroom. Among the most important things he learned was that survival often meant standing up for himself and fighting his way out of tight corners.

His younger years were lived with gusto in an unbroken chain of brawling, hair-raising adventures. Oates frequently got into trouble because he couldn't control his temper; and whenever his temper flared, his fists began to fly. His biggest problem, however, was staying out of the clutches of the law. In March 1850, after a "great old bully" beat him up, Oates wanted to shoot him but could not find a gun. "I had it in me for years afterwards to kill him," he admitted in an autobiographical sketch written late in life, "but I never got a chance." In another fight that happened a few months later, this time with the father of a self-proclaimed spirit medium, whom Oates had exposed as a fraud, he fractured the man's skull and quickly fled for Florida, totally convinced he had murdered his opponent. Although the man recovered, a warrant issued for Oates arrest kept him on the run - and out of Alabama - for several years.

During that time away from Alabama he found work in Florida as a house-painter's apprentice, joined the crew of a gulf schnooer, came down with yellow fever in Pensacola and was declared dead, and wandered along the coast admiring the beauty of mulatto women and laboring at odd jobs. He did not stay anywhere for very long, and mostly he managed to find trouble wherever he went. In Louisiana, where he successfully plied his trade as a painter, he accosted an employer who owed him money by choking him with his left hand and hitting him, as Oates bluntly told it, "in the face eight or nine times with my right fist." The next day, after a Louisiana warrant was issued for his arrest, Oates prudently and quietly moved on to Texas.

Texas was the perfect place for someone of his peculiar talents. In the town of Marshall, which he described as a wild community "infested with gamblers," Oates worked as a painter, attended night school, and "became much addicted to gaming at cards." It did not take long for his temper to explode and his fists to do their damage. A drunkard's insulting remarks led to a street fight; Oates won the bout by nearly gouging the man's eyes out. The next morning the local authorities wrote out a warrant for his arrest, so Oates moved to Waco, Texas.

Life in Waco, one of the rowdiest towns in Texas, was not any better than it had been in Marshall. He found a job cutting shingles and succeeded for a while in minding his own business, but one day, by sheer happenstance (the kind of happenstance that seemed to be Oates's lot in life), he was in the wrong place at the wrong time and witnessed the cold-blooded murder of a Texas Ranger. As Oates pondered his plight he realized he had two choices. He could stay in town, where he would surely be questioned by the Rangers investigating the murder or discovered by the killer who was hiding out with the town's gamblers - all of whom, of course, knew Oates well - or he could get out of town. He decided to quit Waco, but he did not move fast enough. As he was making plans to leave he accidentally offended one of Waco's most notorious gunmen, a fellow known to be "very dangerous" and "half crazy all the time with whiskey and morphine." The gunman insulted Oates and challenged him to a showdown in the street, and Oates was about to buckle on his gunbelt when - for once in his impulsive life - he thought the whole situation over before reacting and concluded that the odds were overwhelmingly stacked in the gunman's favor. Oates satisfied himself by saying he would "pocket" the gunman's insult, and then slipped quietly and unobtrusively out of Waco.

Moving south and west, he settled for a while and worked on a plantation in Bastrop, where he won a good deal of money from his fellow workers in a card game. Before anyone had time to doubt Oates's honesty as a gambler, he packed his personal belongings together and moved to Port Lavaca. He worked again as a housepainter there and fell in love with his employer's daughter. He asked the young woman to marry him, and she accepted, but Oates changed his mind when he caught her one bright moonlit night embracing - much too fondly - a married man. He decided to move on. At his next destination, Henderson, Texas, he miraculously ran into his younger brother, John, who had been dispatched by the family in Alabama to search for Oates and, once he had been found, to bring him home. It appears that John Oates's timing was just about perfect, for William had had about all of Texas he could stand. The brothers agreed to return to Alabama together, but before they could get very far they somehow got involved in a high-stakes card game. When a fight broke out, as anyone who knew Oates could have predicted it would, he used his proven technique of trying to gouge out the eyes of his opponent, in this case, a man named McGuire. "both of his eyes," Oates later explained rather casually, "suffered badly."

Certainly William Oates was not a man to be trifled with. He was brave and reckless, to be sure, but he was also quite dangerous. His youthful appearance - he had a round, full face that made him look cherubic - was deceiving, yet there was no mistaking the stony glare of his dark eyes. Having tested his own strength and endurance so often on the frontier, Oates was self-confident, audacious, and unburdened by the pangs of conscience.

He was handsome and a notorious womanizer. His adventures throughout the Southwest in his early years were punctuated by several lustful and romantic escapades. In Louisiana, he had become involved with "a pretty rosy-cheeked, black-eyed country girl who had not been reared to closely observe the rules observed in the more cultured circles of society." In the back of her family's covered wagon, Oates had carried on "a little love affair" with her.

After returning to Alabama with his brother, Oates could not remain in Pike County, where he was still wanted by the law for assaulting the spirit medium's father. He moved to nearby Henry County and became a schoolteacher, despite his own lack of educational attainments. What he lacked in education, he made up for in ambition. He was determined to make something of himself, and he decided to obtain the kind of schooling that would help him achieve his goals. He attended and was graduated from Lawrenceville Academy, where he worked hard on his studies. Next he read law with an established firm in Eufaula, and passed the bar in October

1858. On his 25th birthday, he opened his own law office in Abbeville. Not content with just practicing law, he put together enough capital to purchase a weekly newspaper and make it a growing concern. The newspaper became his own political mouthpiece, which meant that he and the paper regularly endorsed Democratic party politics, and it also gave him his first opportunity to write for publication. Both his law practice and the newspaper did very well, and Oates, though still a young man, was earning a decent living in Abbeville. In fact, he was pursuing success and respectability as vigorously as he had run from the clutches of the law in his youth.

The outbreak of the Civil War diverted his path, but it did not diminish his ambition. Although he was opposed to secession, and had stated his position publicly in the pages of his newspaper, he could not resist the fervor of Southern patriotism that accompanied the call to arms in the spring of 1861. He helped to raise a company of ornately dressed volunteers known as the "Henry Pioneers", which would later be mustered into the Confederate Army as Company G of the 15th Alabama Infantry. Oates was proclaimed captain by the members of the Pioneers, and though he knew nothing of military acts and conduct, he did his best to teach the men how to be good soldiers. By his own admission, he was "a strict disciplinarian when on duty, but otherwise allowed his men the largest liberty consistent with proper discipline and the good of the service." In August 1861 the 15th Alabama, under the command of Colonel James Canty, left Alabama to join the Confederate forces that had recently defeated Gen. Irvin McDowell's Union Army at the first battle of Bull Run.

About five miles north of Manassas Junction, the 15th Alabama made camp. "Drilling and performing the routine of camp duty was the regular order," Oates remembered, for there was very little for the regiment - or the Confederate Army - to do. During this time of inactivity the men were struck by what Oates called "the worst enemy of our army - the measles." Because the sick were kept in camp the epidemic spread quickly and took the lives of the hundreds. "Had the Confederate authorities made more persistent efforts than they did," Oates grumbled, "hospitals could have been established in sufficient numbers to have saved the lives of hundreds and thousands of good men, which were for want of them unnecessarily sacrificed."

Wanting desperately to see action, Oates and his men instead were sent on marches and countermarches around the countryside. As winter approached the regiment made camp about a mile from Manassas Junction and constructed huts to protect the men from the bitter cold. It was a long and disagreeable winter, Oates recalled, but the men had no cause for complaint: "They had plenty of rations, plenty of clothing, and even luxuries, which their relatives and friends at home sent them." Every two weeks the regiment was required to take its turn on picket duty for two days. "this was about all the service required during the winter," Oates wrote. When the spring of 1862 arrived, wet and miserable in northern Virginia, Gen. Joseph Johnston evacuated the Manassas defense line and moved his army south to protect Richmond. The 15th Alabama marched to the Rappahannock River, where it barely survived several weeks of bad weather, short rations, and deadly disease.

The weather finally improved and the regiment was assigned to join Gen. T.J. "Stonewall" Jackson's army in the Shenandoah Valley. Oates was impressed by the fertile valley and the picturesque Blue Ridge Mountains, which he poetically compared to the Swiss Alps, but he was most favorably impressed by the pink-cheeked women and girls of the Shenandoah who stood by the roadsides cheering on Jackson's wily "Foot Cavalry" as it marched through the valley towns. The women, Oates admiringly wrote in his memoirs "were the most perfect beauties my eyes ever beheld."

Although the 15th Alabama was present for several battles in Jackson's Valley Campaign that spring, it mostly stayed on the sidelines and was not engaged. It experienced some hot fighting at Gaines's Mill on June 27 during the Seven Days battles near Richmond, but most of the regiment's time was taken up waiting for orders that never came. At Cedar Mountain on August 9, 1862, again the 15th watched as their comrades did the fighting. As artillery shells screeched overhead, Oates came across a distraught young lady who had fainted on the battlefield when the thunder of the guns had taken her by surprise. She was, Oates said, "As perfect a beauty as was ever reared on the soil of the Old Dominion." He comforted her, led her to safety, and never saw her again, though he did later find out that her name was Crittenden.

Two weeks later, Jackson's army smashed into Pope's army on the old battlefield at Manassas, and the 15th Alabama was finally in the front ranks. On the evening of August 29 the regiment advanced against the enemy amid considerable confusion over whether the troops in front were actually friend or foe. Oates was sure, despite the darkness and smoke that the musket fire from up ahead came from the enemy. "If they were friends," he reasoned, "they were firing in the wrong direction." As it turned out they were not friends and the regiment soon passed a gully filled with Union dead and wounded. The 15th Alabama also suffered heavy losses as the battle lines swerved back and forth. "Everything around was lighted up by the blaze of musketry and explosion of balls like a continuous bright flash of lightning," Oates reported. "The carnage in our ranks was appalling." He was particularly proud of his company for standing up to the enemy's "tornado of bullets". But Oates understood that courage was a relative attribute, for as he later confessed: "We were not all of us as brave as Caesar, nor were men with few exceptions, at all times alike brave. Much depends upon the state of the nervous system at the time." When a shell exploded near him the following morning, wounding two men beside him, he did not mind admitting that he was "very much frightened."

On September 1, as Lee attempted one last time to outmaneuver Pope's battered army, the 15th Alabama was with the Confederate force that hit the Federal flank at Chantilly during a cold, driving rainstorm. Under the weight of a fierce Union attack the 15th Alabama broke and ran. Oates was wounded in the leg, but was more concerned about "the disgraceful conduct of our men" than he was about his injury. Eventually the 15th reformed and with other Confederate units regained the lost ground.

On the march toward Sharpsburg Oates took sick and was laid up in a house in Shepardstown where he could only hear the sounds of battle. The 15th Alabama was almost annihilated suffering devastating casualties including several of its officers. Four days after the battle when Oates was able to rejoin his regiment, he discovered that he was now the senior ranking officer and given temporary command. Confusion over Oates's rank for the remainder of the war dates from this moment.

Soon after Sharpsburg Oates gave up command of the regiment when Major Alexander A. Lowther returned to duty. Later that autumn Lowther left the regiment again and it would appear that Oates and Captain Issac B. Feagin alternated as acting commanders of the regiment. In May 1863 Oates was permanently promoted to colonel over Feagin, who technically was senior in rank; Oates's commission was retroactively dated to April 28. Although the commission was dutifully delivered to Gen. Lee, the Confederate Congress - for reasons that are not apparent - neglected to confirm the promotion. From the spring of 1863 to the summer of 1864, Oates commanded the regiment using the title and rank of colonel.

But the mayhem over rank and command of the regiment had only begun. Major Lowther suddenly reappeared, this time after having used his political influence with Jefferson Davis to win back the command of the regiment. Lowther, with signed orders, resumed command in July 1864. The orders also promoted Oates - but only to the rank of major as of April 1863, which would mean that Oates had never really been a colonel at

It was an unhappy day when Oates turned over his command to Lowther, whom he despised with a vengeance. Knowing that he had been robbed of both rank and command by the insidious workings of politics, Oates went to Gen. Lee and asked for his help in confirming his proper rank and getting his command back. Lee did not want to get involved and told Oates to take his case directly to President Davis.

Oates did just that, and succeeded in getting a private meeting with Davis in Richmond. Davis explained that there was nothing he could do to alter Lowther's command of the 15th Alabama and claimed that the entire matter was out of his hands. Nevertheless, Davis offered him rank of lieutenant colonel and the command of another Alabama regiment, the 48th Alabama. Quite aware that he had little choice in the matter - that he could turn down Davis' offer and resume his duties as major in the 15th regiment or that he could accept command of the 48th and settle for a promotion to a rank lower than the one he had previously held - Oates chose the latter and reluctantly agreed to Davis' proposal. "My regret," he recalled, was to part with the men with whom I had served all through the war." On February 23, 1865, he was officially promoted to lieutenant colonel and given command of the 48th Alabama Infantry. For the next few months, as the fortunes of the Confederacy rapidly waned, Oates longed to be elevated to the rank of full colonel. He never made it. A commission was prepared in March 1865 to promote him to colonel of cavalry, but the war ended before Confederate authorities could act on it.

Oates was an ambitious man, and this sordid affair over rank and command was, to him, an intolerable miscarriage of justice. Nevertheless, he did not let it stop him from calling himself "colonel" for the rest of his life. It is difficult not to sympathize with his plight; he does seem to have been badly treated and passed over. But it is also apparent that Oates's driving ambition, which caused him to focus so much of his attention on matters of rank and promotion, occasionally impeded his effectiveness as an officer. One soldier in the 15th Alabama, who remembered Oates as "a handsome and brave officer", pointed out that "he was regarded by many as too aggressive and ambitious but he usually was well to the front and did not require his men to charge where he was unwilling to go."

Oates was indeed intrepid on the field of battle. At Fredericksburg in December 1863 he led the 15th Alabama as it charged with the rest of the brigade into Burnside's left flank. "There we were," Oates wrote, "right under the muzzles of the guns, and the Federals replying with 37 pieces, which made the position of the 15th as perilous and disagreeable as well could be." He ordered the men to fix bayonets and advance, even though he would have personally preferred to stay in the trenches. During the frigid night the regiment occupied a railroad cut that was surrounded by piles of Union dead and wounded. "Several of our men were barefooted, the weather was cold, and I ordered them to help themselves to dead men's shoes," he recalled - an honest confession from an officer who obviously cared less about the morality of pillaging shoes from enemy casualties than he did about the welfare of his suffering men. He was also concerned about his own welfare: during the night he expeditiously acquired a pair of Union boots for himself.

Oates showed no lack of daring or courage in combat. At Gettysburg, he and his regiment fought valiantly and desperately to turn the Union left at Little Round Top on July 2; after several attempts to break the line of the 20th Maine, during which the struggle rolled back and forth along a narrow ridge that cut across the hillside, Oates and the 15th were finally driven back by a bayonet attack that surged down the jagged slopes into the hollow below. All this in the searing heat after climbing the jagged slopes of Big Round Top first and without water. (A water detail had been captured.) Casualties

were high that day. Oates's brother John, the brother who had fetched him from Texas, lay mortally wounded among the boulders on Little Round Top. Caught in the swirl of confusion and exhausted nearly to the point of losing consciousness, Oates himself remained calm, clearheaded, and steady. In full command of the regiment for the first time in battle, he was at his finest at Gettysburg. He won no special laurels from his superiors for his resourcefulness and dogged determination during the hand-to-hand struggle with the 20th Maine on Little Round Top, but Joshua Chamberlain, his nemesis on the field that day, would later declare that there were "none braver or better in either army" than Oates and his 15th Alabama. Oates would be convinced to his dying day that it was a tragic mistake that once he occupied Big Round Top that it should have been fortified. "Within half an hour," he later wrote, "I could have converted it into a Gibraltar that I could have held against 10 times the number of his men; hence in my judgement it should be held and occupied by artillery as soon as possible, as it is higher than the other mountain and could command the field." This is essential what he told his superiors but his recommendations fell on deaf ears.

While Oates's valor cannot be denied, he did not always perform brilliantly on the battlefield. On September 20, 1863, at the battle of Chickamauga, he led his regiment forward in a spirited attack on the Union line, but his men became separated from the rest of the brigade. In the disorder that prevailed on the field, Oates decided - without orders - to go to the assistance of the 19th Alabama regiment, which was taking a beating from advancing Federal troops. When Oates's regiment formed its battle line and opened fire, it somehow caught the 19th Alabama in an enfilading volley. Oates later vehemently denied that the incident ever occurred, but it seems likely - whether he was fully aware of it or not - that the 15th had been responsible for the friendly fire that peppered the 19th's right rear.

It was not the only trouble Oates found that day. Later, as the 15th continued to advance, he saw from a hilltop three Union regiments threatening Gen. Kershaw's South Carolina brigade. Without informing Kershaw, and with no other authority for his actions, Oates tried to persuade the South Carolinians to follow him in a charge against the approaching Federals. Except for one captain, the South Carolinians refused. It was bad enough that Oates was wandering across the battlefield totally detached from his own brigade, but he certainly should have known better than to try to assert command over troops that were not his own. If Gettysburg was Oates's finest hour, Chickamauga was his worst.

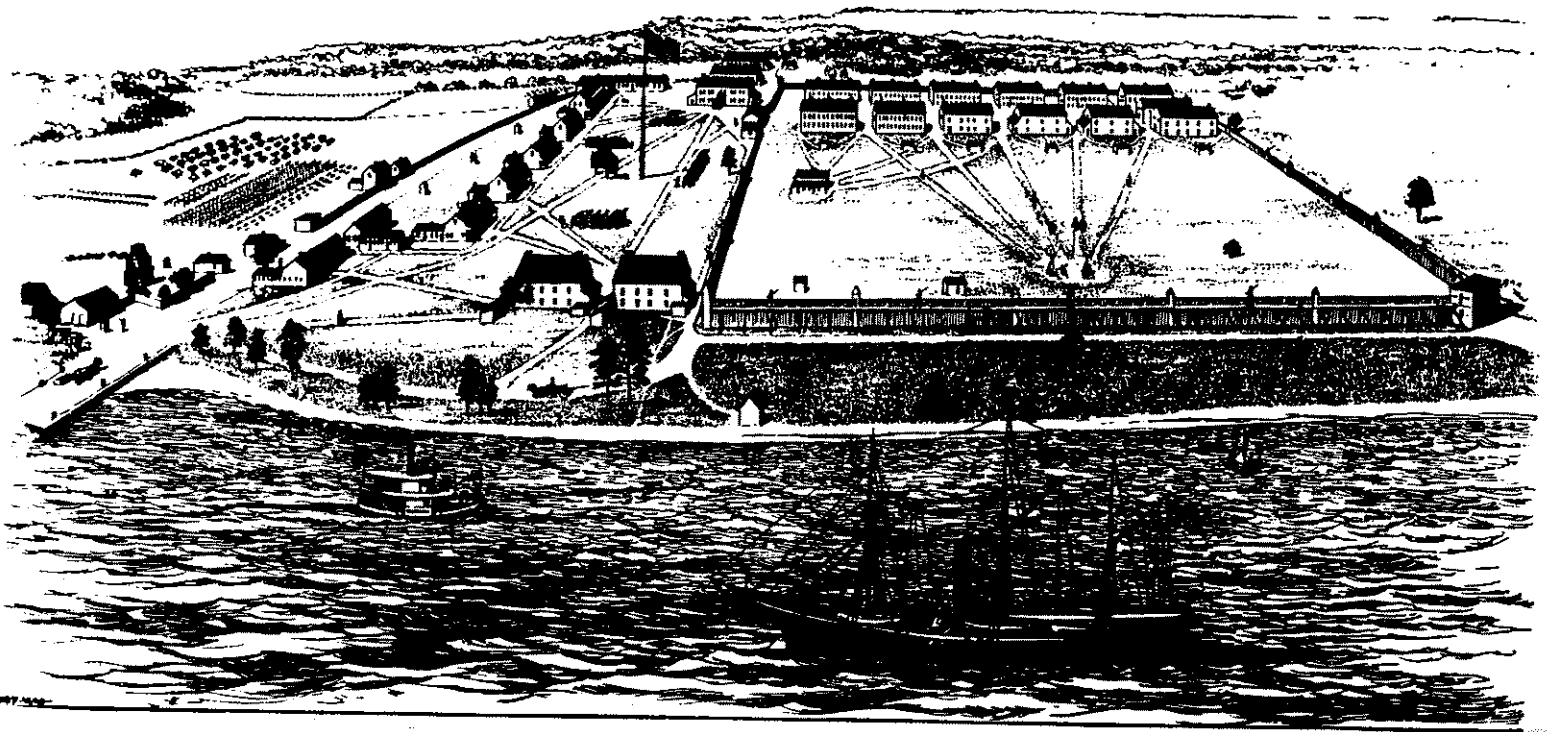
To his credit he fully redeemed himself in later battles, especially at Brown's Ferry and Lookout Valley near Chattanooga in late October 1863, the Wilderness and Spotsylvania in May 1864, Cold Harbor in June 1864, and the siege of Petersburg. But Oates, ever the pragmatist, disdained heroic and romantic images of war and the fame some officers achieve on the battlefield. "All the newspaper talk during the war about gallant leaders," he declared, "was the veriest bosh." So called gallant leaders, he said, "generally accomplish little else than to get themselves shot."

Oates never included himself among the gallant leaders, but he did get himself shot - several times, in fact. In all, he was wounded 6 times in combat, twice severely. Near Fussell's Mills in Virginia on August 16, 1864, as he led his new command - the 48th Alabama - into battle, he was struck in the right arm by a musket ball; under the surgeon's knife the arm was amputated. After recuperating in a Richmond hospital, he was sent home in October, and he never returned to field command. For William Oates the war was over.

Back in Alabama Oates resumed his law practice and became active in state politics. He served in 1868 as a delegate to the National Democratic Convention. From 1870 to 1872 he won election to the Alabama House of Representatives. In 1880, at the age of 45, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he served for 14 years. Two years later he married Sarah Toney, a woman from Eufaula who was half his age. Their only child - William C. Oates, Jr. - was born in 1883. He resigned from Congress in 1894 when he was elected governor of Alabama. He served 2 years then tried to run for the U.S. Senate but failed to win his party's nomination.


He was an unreconstructed rebel who refused to renounce the cause for which he had fought so hard. In 1898, during the Spanish-American war, he was appointed a brigadier general of volunteers by President McKinley. He spent the brief war at Camp Meade, Pennsylvania. In the years before his death he practiced law in Montgomery. His greatest disappointment came when he failed to convince the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association to erect a monument on Little Round Top to the 15th Alabama. He later went on to publish his memoirs in 1905. He died on September 9, 1910. Today there is still no monument on Little Round Top to honor the 15th Alabama.

--- the above was taken directly from the introduction by Mr. Glenn LaFantasie to the Eyewitness to the Civil War of Gettysburg.



JOHNSON'S ISLAND PRISONER OF WAR CAMP

OLLAPOODRIDA



Toward the close of the war, General Grant was trying very hard to streamline his army in an effort to make it more effective. He cut all but what was absolutely necessary away from the artillery, consolidated the number of corps down to three, and tried to reassign officers whose service was not presently needed with his army. One of the officers Grant sought to reassign was General Carl Schurz. Grant sent Schurz to General Sherman with a large envelope, presumably full of important dispatches. Upon Sherman's receipt of the envelope, he retired to examine the contents in private. When he opened the envelope he discovered to his surprise that there was only one letter contained therein. The rest of the bulk had been caused by stuffing the envelope with newspaper. The sole letter was from Grant, and it stated simply "Can you use this man? I have no place for him." Sherman himself filled an envelope with newspapers a few days later, enclosing a note for Grant which was even more succinct. It consisted of only three words: "I can't either." He then gave the envelope to Schurz and sent the none-the-wiser General back to Grant.

General Winfield S. Hancock was known in the army for being quite the strict disciplinarian, and an amusing anecdote came as a consequence of his effort at disciplining some of his men prior to the battle of Fredericksburg. Hancock's men were camped at Snicker's Gap, and from their position they could see the rolling hills of the Shenandoah Valley; a beautiful countryside that was used largely for the raising of sheep. Hancock had issued explicit instructions to his men concerning his views on appropriating items belonging to the citizens of this surrounding countryside. The countryside was not to be marred, and there was to be no confiscation of personal property. Hancock had gone so far as to forbid the men to take rails from farmers fences to burn as firewood. Instead, they were obliged to carry wood from long distances; there being very little wood in the immediate proximity of the bivouac area. It was under these circumstances that Hancock happened upon a group of soldiers crouched over a sheep. Certain that his orders had been violated, he entered into a tirade of denunciations of the men. How dare they disobey his orders and butcher this animal right before his very eyes! His remonstrances were reaching their climax when the sheep sprang to life, jumped to its feet, bleated and ran away, forcing Hancock to drop the issue. The men were so amused by the chagrin of their commander that they named their bivouac "Camp Mutton" in honor of the incident.

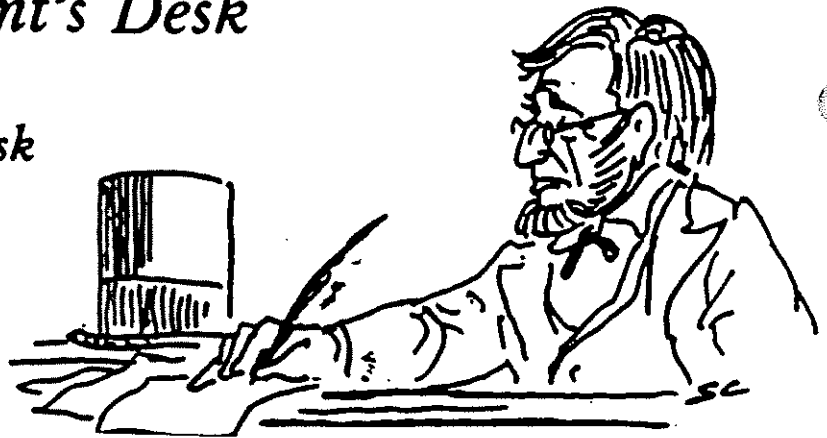
From The President's Desk

From The President's Desk

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The last meeting produced an excellent turnout for an old favorite of the Roundtable, Edward Bearss. Mr. Bearss spoke without notes concerning the Vicksburg campaign giving our fifteen members going on the field trip an excellent overview of the campaign. At this next meeting we will have a report from Dick Crews concerning the field trip and all of the law abiding activities that they engaged in.

This months speaker is Donald Breen of the Amherst Historical Society to talk about Johnson's Island. This is one of the closest Civil War sites to our area and may be a good place for local field trip in the springtime. We are still looking for ideas for the spring field trip and if anyone has a contribution on this topic please bring them to my attention.

The usual monthly reminder to make sure you make your reservations early and call Ann Caputo at 861-5588 to make your reservations by Monday, October 9 for the meeting this next coming month. There will be a \$8.00 surcharge for anyone who does not make their reservation by that time.

I would also like to remind everybody that the Constitution requires that each member attends at least three meetings per year to maintain good standing. If you had not already planned to attend please do so as I believe this will be a most entertaining meeting.

One last usual monthly reminder, please get your dues in. Nobody likes to chase anybody for the dues and it makes it far easier to budget for the coming year if the dues are paid promptly.

Finally, there will be desert this month. There was a vocal element (the educators in the Roundtable) that threatened a food fight if we did not serve up desert. So, we will.

Very truly yours,

John D. Sutula



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