



The Charger

CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUND-TABLE

P.O. BOX 5028 • CLEVELAND, OHIO 44101

JANUARY, 1980

VOLUME 23 NUMBER 12

194th Meeting

DATE: January 8th
SPEAKER: Stuart P. Cramer
SUBJECT: "The Most Controversial Character of the War"
PLACE: The Hermit Club
PRELIMINARIES: 6:00 P.M. Dinner: 7:00 P.M.

~~~~~

Born in Cleveland through no particular choice, I spent a few early years in Florida, where, I believe, I picked up the Civil War virus that has been with me ever since. Graduated from Cleveland Heights High School in 1930, then from W.R.U. and Law School, being admitted to the bar in 1938, after which I went into the advertising and show business. A professional magician for 50 years, playing schools, churches, nightclubs, vaudeville, college lecture courses, women's clubs, sales meetings and trade shows all over the country and some in Europe. Was with the U.S.O. before being commissioned in the Navy, and served in the Pacific Theatre as a communications officer. Joined the Cleveland Civil War Round Table in 1963 or '64, and look forward each year to our field trips. I've had the pleasure of editing The Charger for the past 15 issues.....Stu Cramer.



My subject, "The most Controversial Character in the War," was the man who:

Would have been President had he said "yes."

His father was a pirate.

He was a famous criminal lawyer before the war.

Was Senior Major General in the Union Army.

A hero in 1861 and lauded by the press; an international villain by 1864, the favorite scapegoat of the press.

Probably the most hated man in the south before Sherman's march.

Jefferson Davis branded him an outlaw, to be hanged if captured.

Led the impeachment proceedings against Andrew Johnson.

At least one writer said he was "ineffable."

He maneuvered through Congress the first civil rights bill.

The Dictionary of American Biography states: He moved in a continuous atmosphere of controversy which widened from local quarrels with the Governor of Massachusetts until it included most of the governments of the world....

And he rode a cross-eyed horse.

## CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUND-TABLE

*Founded Nov. 19, 1957*

President: Charles Spiegle  
Secretary: Tom Geshke  
Treasurer: John Harkness

Executive Committee: 1980

Stuart Cramer  
Milton Holmes

1981

Robert Bayless  
John Tormey

Editor and Illustrator of  
The Charger: Stuart Cramer  
Assist. Editor: Hazel Cramer  
P.O. Box 444, Vermilion, O.  
44089

Cleve. CWRT, P.O. Box 5028  
Cleveland, Ohio 44101



## Johnnie Reb's Secret Weapon

This article, which appeared in the Miami Herald last November, was sent in by member Jack Cullen, one of our founders and past presidents.

ATHENS, Ga. — (AP) — A Confederate secret weapon — a double-barreled cannon that killed a cow but never worked well enough to be fired at the Yankees — has been enshrined in a park here.

"The idea was that if you fired two cannon balls connected by a chain ... they would sweep across the battlefield knocking down a great number of soldiers," said James Reap, president of the Athens Clarke Heritage Foundation.

The cannon, with its two four-foot barrels, was designed by John Gilleland, a contractor and private in an elite home-guard unit for businessmen not eligible for service in the Confederate Army.

The cannon failed because its designers could not get both barrels to fire simultaneously even though they had a common breech, Reap said.

"In some of their experiments, according to local history, when one barrel fired before the other the chain broke," Reap said. "Pieces of

chain went flying off, and it was downright dangerous to the people who were firing it."

According to one contemporary report, the cannon was fired at a target of poles and the twin shot flew off in "kind of a circular motion, plowed up an acre of ground, tore up a cornfield, mowed down saplings, and then the chain broke. One ball killed a cow in a distant field, while the other knocked down the chimney of a log cabin," Reap said.

The cannon, with two four-foot barrels angled three degrees apart, fired six-pound balls connected by an eight-foot chain. Thirty-six local citizens raised the \$350 it cost to cast the weapon at an Athens foundry.

The cannon, on its wood field carriage with large, spoked wheels, had been "outside city hall chained to a tree for a long time," Reap said. Now it has been moved a few yards to a concrete pad in a landscaped park.



## Troxell on Pryor Well-Received

The December 11th meeting was a lively one. With the Hermit Club's choir rehearsing downstairs, some of the members were inspired to start our own songfest. This spirit of gemulikeit was helped along when John Tormey treated the crowd to servings of wine.

Ed Troxell delivered a fine, literate and clear talk on Confederate General Roger A. Pryor. The talk was well-named "A Study in Extremes," for Pryor rose from the lowly position of a small newspaper editor to one of the 50 greatest lawyers of the 19th Century. He was a sessionist fire-brand, coming into prominence before the war with his fiery speeches and participation in the surrender negotiations at Ft. Sumter as a representative of General Beauregard.

He was a descendant of Pocahontas, and always had an "Indianish look" by the way he wore his straight black hair. As a brigade commander, he distinguished himself at the Battle of Seven Pines.

Ed pointed out that General Pryor's military downfall came at Antietam, when R. H. Anderson was wounded and as S.O.P. Pryor succeeded to command except that in the heat of the battle, nobody told him! Consequently he refused a request from Pendleton for a guard on the reserve artillery — justifiable as a brigadier commander and not knowing he was in division command and could touch other brigades. Somehow in the command structure — because of Lee's loose policies — he was never truly forgiven and his troops were taken away from him.

Roger Pryor originated the phrase, "A house divided shall not stand," and on arriving at Charleston he also coined the prescient phrase: Strike the first blow and Virginia will follow. After the war, as a New York lawyer he became, in contrast to his South Carolina days, a champion of Union. Eventually he was elevated to an appellate court. (Notes by Fred Gill.)

Most of the great paintings of Napoleon Bonaparte depict him mounted on white horses (Greys, they are called.) "Napoleon at Eylau," by Goss, "Napoleon," by Charlet; Barthelemy's "Bonaparte in Egypt," "Napoleon at Tilsit," by Debret, "Bonaparte at Rivoli, by Philippoteaux, "Waterloo," by Guido Sigriste; a painting by Raffet, and the one mounting, after Ratisbonne; another of him at Friedland, and at Wagram, and so on ad infinitum.

As a matter of fact, the Little Corporal used horses of many other colors; bays, chestnuts, mottles, golden bays, and blacks. He usually took about 20 steeds with him to every battle. As Emperor he had a personal stable of over one hundred stallions and mares, each a superb specimen of its breed. He claimed to have had at least fifteen shot out from under him.

He did not brag, however, about what a poor rider he was. Like the Prince of Wales generations later, he quite often fell off or was thrown. He was remarkable for his fearlessness and endurance once in the saddle - the problem was staying there. According to eye-witnesses he generally rode at a gallop, and was ungainly and ungraceful, due principally to his short legs, long torso and heavy shoulders.

At Waterloo it is a known fact that Napoleon successively mounted Désiré, Cerere (killed by a bullet), Marie (sometimes called Zina), and Marengo. Marie and Marengo were abandoned on the retreat and taken by Prussian General Blucher. Later one of Wellington's officers took Marengo to England, where the skeleton is now buried at Whitehall Military Institute.

\* \* \* \* \*

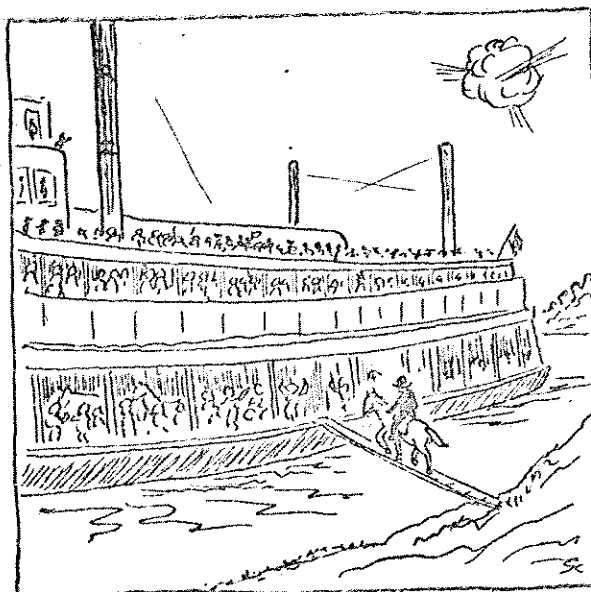
General Joe Hooker loved to sit on his beautiful big grey (looked white) charger sipping brandy and water as he reviewed his troops.

\* \* \* \* \*

General George "Rock of Chickamauga" Thomas favored a big 16-hands-high bay, "Billy," named after General Sherman. Thomas, who weighed over 200 pounds, required a stout steed. Like his master, "Billy" was sedate and not easily disturbed from his usual calm even amidst bursting shells. In retreat the horse did not hurry his footsteps, much to the distress of the staff. "Billy" carried the portly general through the battles of Chickamauga, Chattanooga, Atlanta and Nashville.

\* \* \* \* \*

Most all biographies of Grant comment upon his extraordinary skill as a horseman. My favorite example of this is his feat of riding up a



↑  
4  
continued on page

# FRED GILL'S BOOK REVIEW

## HISTORY AS LITERATURE

U.S. Grant and the Military Tradition by Bruce Catton, Brown, Boston:  
Little, Brown and Company: 1954

Many great books have been written about the Civil War and what happened before and after. Our shelves contain many of them but if this little gem of only one hundred and ninety pages is missing, then one of the very best is missing.

From beginning to end Catton's prose is dazzling. It is sheer pleasure to read, whether or not you are interested in the content. The book should be required reading in every college freshman English course in the land, for it is a model on the language.

This alone does not make it a great history book. What does is the lean, quick way Catton calls forth the fabric of America before the Civil War, how Grant's early life conditioned him for the war, how the war went and why the Grant Presidency, tragic and shameful, was inevitable. It is the story of the United States slowly emerging from agricultural near isolation to the threshold of industrialism and world power; and Grant, of all people, was in the boiling center. He could not escape becoming President because during the war and after he was the living symbol of what the Union was; in truth, what the American people were, both North and South.

The best description anywhere of the whole Civil War is in the section of the book entitled "The Great Commander." These seventy-four glittering pages contain the core of the military and political action of the war and why it went the way it did. Only a historian with a clear and discerning eye could have done this; and he had to be a writer of distinction to do it this way.

The whole book is like a great vein of a gold mine. You must follow this great vein, but almost every paragraph is a smaller and branching vein that gleams and beckons you almost irresistibly to follow it. This makes the book stand alone.

It may be this review is my atonement for previously having taken a left-handed swipe at a great historian and writer. \* Anyway, get this book and read it with pleasure.

\* December, 1979 Charger

---

## HORSEY, etc.

---

narrow plank at Belmont, the last one to board a transport and escape the on-coming Confederates.

\* \* \* \* \*

Previous to the Battle of Antietam, Confederate soldiers were sent out to forage food and horses in the surrounding area. One foraging party made off with the only riding horse belonging to a farmer by the name of Jacob Henry Cost. Having heard that General Jackson was camped not too far away, Cost went to call on him and requested the return of his mare because she was seriously needed on the farm. Something about the farmer's manner appealed to the General and the question was raised if he could identify the horse. Mr. Cost told him that upon orders the horse would kneel and bow her head to say her prayers. They went to the corral, where a number of horses were quartered, whereupon the visitor walked among the horses, found his, patted her on the head and said, "Daisy - kneel down and say your prayers." The mare obeyed without a moment's delay. Gen. Jackson told his men to release the horse to its rightful owner, and Farmer Cost rode back home.

# Stage Magic During The War

5

Concluding our series\*on famous magicians who performed in this country during the Civil War, another native Englishman takes the spotlight. Heretofore the careers of Wyman, Anderson, and Blitz have provided us with anecdotes that involved either the War or President Lincoln; Robert Heller was unique in that his career blossomed during the war years here with apparently no connection or effect from the Conflict.

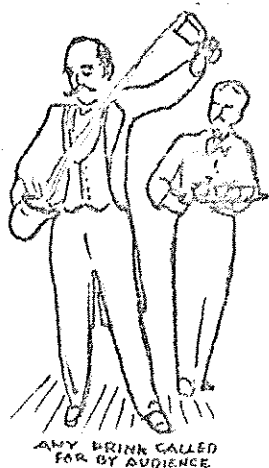
His performances were so excellent that they attracted audiences regardless of current events or the vicissitudes of war. There is nothing this writer has found that would indicate that Heller paid the slightest heed to the raging war other than to confine his performances to the major cities of the northeast.

Born in Canterbury, England, as William Henry Palmer, around 1826, he was the son of the organist at Canterbury Cathedral. While in his teens he won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music and then attended King's College also on a musical scholarship. From boyhood he was interested in magic, and after witnessing a performance by Robert-Houdin in London in the late 1840's decided upon a career as a professional magician. Robert-Houdin, the most famous European magician of his time, is called "the father of modern magic." (It was from this famous conjuror that one Erich Weiss, years later, assumed the name of "Harry Houdini.")

It is not clear why Heller changed his name from Palmer, but when he started out he did imitate Robert-Houdin, affected a French accent, and even wore a black wig. It was not until he dropped the imitation and found his own style that he was successful. Heller, by combining a natural wit, magic, music and "second sight" (mentalism or E.S.P. magic, as we know it today) attracted the highest circles of Society to his shows. His cultured manner, personality, humorous approach, and virtuosity as a pianist established him as a premier entertainer after he came to America in 1852. His popularity and success continued throughout the Civil War and on into the 1870's.



One of the high points of Heller's career here came in New York during 1964-65 when he took the French Theatre at 585 Broadway and renamed it "Heller's Salle Diabolique." In this theatre he established one of the longest runs of any magician in America. He frequently changed programs, offering such diverse features as the Hindu trick of shoving swords through a basket containing an assistant, spiritualistic manifestations, and various colorful productions, always retaining the second sight act and the music.



There is little doubt that Robert Heller's popular entertainments must have attracted many famous generals and politicians during his extended engagements in New York, Washington, Boston and Baltimore during the Civil War. Visualize Victor Borge with magic and mind-reading added to his brilliant musical-comedy and you have Heller, as well-known in his day as is the former today.

In 1870 Heller embarked upon a grand tour of Australia, China, Malay, Java, India, Ceylon, New Zealand, Mexico, Ireland, Scotland and England. He returned to the United States in 1878 for his final appearances, became ill during his last performance, in Philadelphia, completed it, and died on November 28, 1878. To this writer's knowledge, he never became a citizen of the U.S.A.

As a final note to this series, it may strike one as curious how all of these Civil War-time wizards, and dozens since their time, could undertake such extensive and successful tours of so many foreign lands, involving so many different languages. It is true that some were bilingual, but the one sustaining factor is obvious, and that is the universal appeal of the ancient Art of Magic.



While Zebulon Vance's brigade of North Carolinians was lying down in a line before the final advance (at Malvern Hill) a rabbit sprang out of a bush and, running along their front, caused yells and laughter, so light was the spirit of these men facing death. They called out, "Run, run, run." A staff officer asked if he should shoot it. Vance said, (in recalling the incident) "I shook my head and called out, run cotton-tail! I'd run too if I wasn't Governor of North Carolina!"

from A Treasury of Tales, Legends and Folklore of the Civil War, by B.A.Botkin

\* \* \* \* \*

Among the Federal wounded at the Battle of Peachtree Creek was Irish-born Colonel Tom Reynolds of Giles Smith's division. Reynolds was struck in the leg by a minie-ball. As the surgeons prepared to amputate, Reynolds relied upon the Celtic gift of gab to talk them out of it. It was an Irish leg, he told them, imported and not domestic and thus of more than ordinary value. The doctors concluded that if, at such a time, he could make a joke of the matter, they would trust to his vitality to save the limb. After the war Reynolds walked with it up the driveway of his home in Madison, Wisconsin.

from The Siege of Atlanta 1864 by Samuel Carter III

The above two items were submitted by member Brian Kowell. Thanks, Brian.

\* \* \* \* \*

Somewhere I have read that Berdan's Sharpshooters were all Swiss, even though selections were made from the best crackshots from many states. Any light on this?

\* \* \* \* \*

Although the Civil War ended 115 years ago, two Confederate officers, Colonel John Mosby and General Jubal Early, are still causing trouble. Mosby's grandson, Beverly Coleman, succeeded in getting a resolution introduced in the Virginia Senate last spring renaming the Little River Turnpike and part of Route 50 the John S. Mosby Highway. However, residents along the Turnpike, which runs between Alexandria and Fairfax City, are opposing the plan (they feel the present name has historical significance and besides, they don't want to change their addresses). At this point it appears Coleman will probably settle for renaming a section of Route 50 after his grandfather.

And a little further north, Frederick, Maryland, is still trying to get back the \$200,000 ransom money it paid Early. Senator Charles Mathias (R. Md.) has introduced legislation in Congress to reimburse the town. Early, who was seeking to relieve some of the pressure on Lee, moved toward Washington through Frederick in July, 1864. He threatened to burn the town if they didn't pay, and the town officials were forced to borrow the money. The loans took 85 years to repay. Mathias' bill is currently in the Senate Judiciary Committee, but the likelihood of its passing is slim - Mathias has introduced the same bill every year since 1961. (Courtesy Chicago CWTR)

\* \* \* \* \*

Ever hear of a regiment of Pennsylvanians called, among other things, "Buell's Body Guard," or "Anderson Cavalry?" This was an organization of blue-stocking young men who formed the organization to avoid being drafted or facing combat. When they learned that Buell had been relieved by Rosecrans, on the eve of the Battle of Murfreesboro, they mutinied - the new commander had declined them as a bodyguard and had ordered them to the front. They were arrested, jailed, and court-martialled. But money and influence in high places got all 350 off the hook.

