



THE CHARGER

THE CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

November 2025

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PROGRAM – “United States Colored Troops (USCT)”

SPEAKER – Captain Edward Gantt. Captain Gantt is a retired U.S. Navy flight officer. He has been a reenactor and living historian since 2014 when he became associated with the 23rd Regiment USCT reenactors organization. He is currently a member of the 54th Massachusetts Reenactment group in the Washington, DC, area.

LOCATION: The Holiday Inn Independence at 6001 Rockside Road, Independence, Ohio 44131, off US Interstate 77

TIME: Social Hour at 6:00 PM and Presentation at 7:30 PM

For reservations email:

ccwrtreserve@gmail.com. To ensure a dinner is reserved for you, the reservation must be made by Tuesday, November 4, 2025

Website:

<http://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com>

MEETING – November 12, 2025

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President's Message

Fellow Roundtable Members:

In last month's *Charger*, there was a notice that members of the CCWRT were invited to a historical walking tour of Oberlin, Ohio, arranged by our CCWRT Local Field Trip Committee and to be led by Amanda Manahan from the Oberlin Heritage Center. On October 18th I attended this outing with several of our members. The day was fantastic, and we all learned so much about Oberlin and its place in the history of the abolition of slavery and the formation of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) during the Civil War. The following is my report on this trip, including my thoughts and some pictures of the event.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Judge Patton's comments are extra-long, but so important to understanding the place of Oberlin in Civil War history, that we have decided to break this down into two parts. Part 1 is presented this month, and Part 2 will be in the December issue.]

A Historical Journey to Oberlin, Ohio in October 2025

Tracing the Roots of Abolitionism, Education, and Activism in 19th-Century Ohio was the theme of the local field trip Judge William Vodrey put together for members of the CCWRT in October. Our Tour Guide told us about the Echoes of Freedom still in the Oberlin community, she led us on a wonderful walking tour of the campus. She started off by telling us the history of the oldest church in Oberlin, established in 1833 as a utopian, radically

integrated church in a college town. The first preacher in town was The Rev Charles G Finney, who believed in the abolition of slavery, woman's rights, and universal suffrage.

As autumn leaves drift across the quiet streets of Oberlin, Ohio, in October 2025, the town's character seems imbued with the echoes of its transformative past. Visitors and students strolling past the historic college buildings and tree-lined avenues might find themselves transported back to the 1830s when Oberlin stood at the crossroads of faith, social reform, and the fight for freedom. The legacy of its founding, closely interwoven with the anti-slavery movement and the dynamic figures of Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, remains palpable in every brick and cobblestone.



CCWRT members standing with statue of
Col. (later General) Giles W. Shurtleff, 5th USCT

Oberlin's journey began with a radical vision: to establish a school open to all, regardless of race or gender, guided by Christian principles and a commitment to social justice. The financial obstacles were daunting, but the town's early leaders—Presbyterian ministers John J. Shepherd and P. Stewart were undeterred in their mission. They traveled tirelessly, appealing to churches, abolitionist networks, and

sympathetic individuals across Ohio and the Northeast for funds to build the fledgling institution. Their appeals were not just for buildings or books, but for a moral cause: creating a community dedicated to equality and the education of both men and women, Black and white alike. They were the Key Figures doing the early fundraising to start a new college in the west.

Early fundraising events often took the form of impassioned sermons, public meetings, and personal visits to wealthy patrons. Portraits and lithographs from the period reveal earnest gatherings in modest churches and town halls, the faces of men and women illuminated by candlelight as they listened to appeals for justice and learning. These images capture the conviction and hope that animated Oberlin's founders and supporters. In every building we entered there were pictures with historic references to pre-Civil War activities and the names of town people, students and faculty members who were involved with the mission of Oberlin.

Our tour guide explained, before Oberlin claimed national attention, Lane Seminary in Cincinnati was the epicenter of theological education and debate in the West. Established in 1829, Lane Seminary was led by the formidable Lyman Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe's father, a prominent Presbyterian Minister known for his fiery sermons and reformist zeal. The seminary attracted young men hungry not only for biblical knowledge but also for engagement with the pressing social issues of their time—chief among them, slavery.

Lane Seminary's brick buildings, as depicted in early engravings, stood at the edge of a rapidly growing city, a beacon for

those who believed that faith demanded action. The seminary's curriculum, while rigorous, soon took a backseat to the heated discussions that would make Lane Seminary famous.

Rev Lyman Beecher's influence, legacy and family impact extended far beyond Lane's walls in Cincinnati. His daughter, Harriet Beecher Stowe, absorbed her father's passion for both religion and reform, a legacy that would one day shape her writing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The Beecher household was a crucible of debate and activism, fostering a sense of moral urgency that was to ignite a national consciousness.

Our tour guide explained, Harriet Beecher, though not a Lane student herself, attended many of her father's lectures and was deeply moved by the anti-slavery fervor she witnessed. Later, her novels and lectures would draw directly from the stories and struggles of those associated with Lane Seminary and Oberlin College. The Beecher's thus became a symbol of the intertwined destinies of faith, education, and abolitionism in antebellum America.

In 1834, Lane Seminary erupted in a series of debates that would reverberate throughout the nation. Students, many already sympathetic to abolition, organized formal discussions on the morality and practicality of immediate emancipation. Over the evening's debates at Lane Seminary, these young men—white and Black—debated, shared individual experiences, and listened to accounts from formerly enslaved people and became student activist with the controversy that came along after the debate. The outcome was decisive: most Lane Seminary students declared themselves in

favor of immediate, uncompromising abolition and the right of women to have a college education. The seminary's trustees, alarmed by the controversy and the prospect of losing financial support from more conservative donors, moved to suppress further debate. In protest, nearly half the student body—known as the “Lane Rebels” resigned in masse. These students were determined to find a new home where conscience and activism would not be stifled.

Migration of Lane Seminary Students to Oberlin: started the Formation of the New Community of activists in Oberlin; Oberlin's founders seized the opportunity to invite the Lane Rebels to join their nascent school. The arrival of these students in Oberlin transformed the college almost overnight. They brought with them a spirit of activism and a commitment to integrated education. The Lane Rebels demanded in writing that Black students and Women be admitted to the school in Oberlin. Black and White students learned side by side, and Oberlin soon became a critical node in the Underground Railroad, offering both sanctuary and support to those fleeing enslavement.



Our guide, Amanda Manahan, talking to the group.

Our tour guide showed Images from early Oberlin showing a modest but bustling community, with students from diverse backgrounds working together in classrooms, farm fields, and workshops—a living embodiment of the ideals for which they had left Lane Seminary.

In the “First Church,” we learned about the Abolitionist Movement in Ohio, Social Tensions and Reactions. Ohio in the 1830s was a battleground for the nation's conscience. While many communities supported abolitionist efforts, others reacted with suspicion or hostility. Oberlin's radical stance attracted both admiration and scorn. The town faced threats, economic boycotts, and even mob violence. Churches in the north split over the issue of slavery, newspapers published heated editorials, and politicians debated the limits of free speech and moral obligation. Despite these tensions, Oberlin's abolitionists pressed forward. Their courage inspired similar movements in neighboring towns and helped to build a broader coalition for change across Ohio and the Midwest.

Central to Oberlin's activism in the 1830's were the public lectures, spirited debates, and petitions that filled the town's calendar and were held at Rev Finney's Church. Nationally known speakers, including Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth visited Oberlin to rally support for abolition, recounting firsthand the horrors of slavery and the imperative for action. Local citizens organized petition drives, collecting signatures to demand legislative change in Ohio and beyond. Petitions, lectures, and events in this church in Oberlin were shaping winds of change and the new era.

During my time as a college student in Athens, Ohio, I discovered the history of

early abolitionist movements in the northern United States. As a visitor to the Oberlin campus walking tour, I learned of how the Church and student activism were vital to Oberlin's storied past. In the autumn of 2025, the legacy of its early abolitionists remains alive in the college's continued commitment to justice and equality. The story of Oberlin, Lane Seminary, the Beecher family, and the Lane Rebels is one of faith in action, a belief that education and activism can reshape society. The images and memories preserved from that era remind us that the struggle for freedom is both historical and an ongoing call echoed in the voices and actions of every new generation. Our tour guide documented these events with old pictures and written accounts. The photographs show crowded lecture halls and clusters of townspeople engaged in heated discussion. The sense of purpose and urgency is evident in every image, a testament to the determination that defined the era.

in February 1835 Oberlin college is not the first college in the nation to accept African-American students, but it is the first college in the nation to have an open enrollment policy. This is the first college where black women can get an education because the Lane rebels demanded equality before they would leave Cincinnati for Oberlin. Other Black people escaping slavery settled in Oberlin and because of the educational school opportunities for higher educational and employment opportunities, by the 1850s 20% of Oberlin's population were former slaves.

If you were a student and you were not at Church on Sunday, Rev Finney would come looking for you. This progressive approach

to education and community life set Oberlin apart from other towns in the region. The commitment to equality and integration, while remarkable, did not entirely erase the challenges faced by Black residents and other marginalized groups. Even as Oberlin strove to embody its ideals, the persistence of certain social barriers served as a reminder that the path toward true equity was ongoing. The educational and social advancements made here, however, laid critical groundwork for the broader civil rights movements that would follow in the coming decades.

The college was integrated, the dormitories and the classrooms were integrated, the public schools were integrated, as were the downtown business district and the social clubs. This was a unique community pre civil War. Socially there was still segregation in the town. Social customs were still here; there were still inequities in the town that we would explore during the tour. I am large; however, this was a place of opportunities which were not available elsewhere.

The other thing happens at this exact time, a decision in Canada which will make significant changes as a British Colony, they will abolish slavery in 1834 and so especially once the underground railroad starts wrapping up and the United States passes the fugitive slave law in 1850, Oberlin becomes a sanctuary and all these kind of conditions of Oberlin being in Ohio, with access to Canada, this makes northern Ohio an excellent location, an ideal location for the underground railroad. It is estimated that three thousand freedom seekers traveled to Oberlin via the underground railroad.

during the years leading up to the civil war

I will just very briefly talk about the church here. This church is one of the oldest structures still standing in the community. It was built between 1842 and 1844 and when it was completed, it was the largest structure of its kind in the State of Ohio. Over two thousand people could pack in here at one point. They had taken out some church pews and did some remodeling to make it more comfortable for the large crowds, but students usually sat in the balcony area and community members down below. Rev Finny would attract thousands of people to his service. since knew that they needed a space like this to accommodate that crowd because they put so much effort into it and they use this as a meeting or a place for lectures.



The “Meeting House,” which is a Quaker term, would operate their meetings here in the church, in a debate lectures style. Frederick Douglass came to this church, and he debated Ace McLaughan, the first President of Oberlin College, William L Garrison was in the on the debate stage also. They debated what the end of slavery should look like. Over the years the Meeting House/Church also had Mark Twain,

Woodrow Wilson, Maya Angelou and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr has spoken here a couple times.

The church had its fair share above the activities during Civil War, for example when the Civil War first broke out, that first mass meeting the President of the college would be speaking to the students, gathering support for the Union when the first shots were fired at Fort Sumner and the Fort was turned over to the Confederacy, within days you have mass enlistments of students coming out of the church. within a week they had over one hundred men enlisting into the Army out of Oberlin: Company C, 7th OVI.



A question from one of the members of the CCWRT; What was the population of Oberlin at the start of the Civil War?

Around 2,200, and a thousand men enlisted out of Oberland. There was another question about the book, “the city which started or commenced the civil war” Was this an overstatement? The Oberlin Historical Society said this was from a quote, which said, Oberlin commenced this war or something like that. In effect, Oberlin did not start the Civil War, but Oberlin was reflected on what was happening nationally

and participated in a lot of the movements that led up to the civil war.

Rev Finney had built the church to his specifications, he wanted to be able to make eye contact with every single person in his congregation. He was used to preaching at tent revivals. He was used to preaching in the round, which is why you can see the rounded canopy up here, this was borrowed from architectural plans from Richard Bond out of Boston.

Question>> are there other churches in the town?

Not at this time, this was the only church for almost 40 years. There will be a split in the Church, it is not even the split, per se. The church was just the congregation was literally not one of it, it was the largest congregation in the nation. Rev Finney attracted many people and again everybody who lived here was expected to attend church here, they had to split off to a second congregational church in the 1860s.

Q>> was the dominion of the church congregational back then?

Our tour guide explained, the founders of the Church were Presbyterian, but they quickly moved to become Congregationalists, especially with Rev Jenny from Lane Seminary coming on board.

The church was also a community site, including funerals and there was a funeral held here in 1853. It was for a boy named Lee Howard Dobbins. Dobbins was an enslaved child; he had been enslaved in Kentucky. When he was about an infant his mother passed away and he was taken in by another enslaved woman and she had

daughters of her own. Being in Kentucky the reality of life was that people were oftentimes being sold down the river to a different kind of slavery. She was told her daughters were going to be sold away from her, she decided that she is going to take her family north in order to keep them together, to get to freedom as they are making their way through Ohio though. Lee starts to become sick and by the time that they end up here in Oberlin, he is not going to be able to continue the last little bit to Canada.

She has this unimaginable choice that she must make, does she stay here with Lee, knowing that this community is safer than a lot during this time. But knowing that at any time still, somebody could take that family back into slavery? Or does she leave Lee here with strangers and take her daughters to Canada and ensure their survival, their freedom, their safety but knowingly leaving her son behind. she decides to do the latter move on to Canada with her children, with her daughters and Lee is left here in Oberlin. About a week after the family left, they did make it to Canada successfully.

Lee unfortunately passed away and the community held a funeral for him. the community was really hit hard by his death and his death further illustrated to this community the evils of slavery. Each family donated some money for the purchase of a headstone. It was not only a funeral for Lee, but it was also a call to action. The Tomb stone read, let slavery parish, Lee Howard Dobbins a fugitive slave boy brought me about his adoptive mother and died March 26, 1854. Age four years. The community rallied around Lee Dobbins this young boy who's died in the pursuit of freedom. They

held a funeral here in Oberlin, where over one thousand people packed into this church for his service. Each family put forth a bit of money for the erection of a gravestone and it was not only a memorial to Lee it was a call to action. This tomb stone read "let slavery parish." Lee Howard Dobbins a fugitive slave boy brought here by his adoptive mother, died March 26th, 1854, age Four years old. The original marker is in the Oberlin Underground Railroad Center.

We departed from the First Church of Oberlin to commence our guided walking tour of the college and surrounding city. In 1843, Oberlin College awarded its first degree to a woman through the institution's "Ladies Program," and during the 1840s, African American students began attending Oberlin as well. The first African American student graduated in 1862. In the 1850s, four women were admitted to Oberlin; among them was Lucy Stanton Gay Sessions, a Cleveland native whose father was an educator. She later married William Howard Day, a notable abolitionist and newspaper publisher based in Cleveland.



In 1862, Mary Jane Patterson became the first African American graduate of Oberlin College. Her family moved from North Carolina to Oberlin, settling near the current art museum, though how they gained their freedom is unknown. The area, called Patterson's Corner, was home to their grocery store and residence, and all the children attended Oberlin schools. Graduating during the Civil War, Mary Jane overcame both racial and gender barriers, earning her degree about thirty years after the college was established.

Q>>, did they have majors back there in the 1860s?

What they had in the 1850's were called the classical courses, the ladies' classes what today we will call a BA. They had really did not have Majors in the 1850's. The colleges started majors around the 1890's. they did have a theological program in the early 1800s, and you could receive a Doctoral degree in Theology, and they could have called it Oberlin University, but they never did.

Q>> How much did it cost to attend Oberlin College?

A>> When the school started, tuition was \$17.00 per year.

The students were expected to work four hours every day except the Sabbath; it was like a work study program. Students might work on a farm, or do some labor around the school, the woman might cook or sew clothes or clean the classrooms.

George Bushawn is the first African American male graduate of Oberlin College; he graduated in 1844. He was the son of an educator and after graduation he moved back to his home state of Pennsylvania. He became a lawyer, but the State of Pennsylvania would not admit a Black man

two sit for the bar! George Bushwa moves to New York State where he passes the state bar and becomes New York's first African American lawyer.

We would not think of Oberlin as a HBCU by any stretch of the imagination; however, Oberlin has a relationship with many of the HBCU's because many of the founders of the Historically Black Colleges have roots in Oberlin. John Mercer Langston was Ohio's first Black lawyer, and he worked together as a lawyer in Washington, DC to start Howard University's Law School after the Civil War. Before the Civil War, John Mercer Langston was on the Board of Education for the city of Oberlin city schools. He may be the most famous person to come out of Oberlin College. Charles Langston who fought during the Civil War was John M Langston's Grandfather.

--- Charles L. Patton

The Editor's Desk



The picture we use for the mast of this column is a drawing of the celebrated *London Times* correspondent, William Howard Russell, who was sent to the United States in 1861 to report on our Civil War. Russell was an interesting character. He could be highly critical of Abraham Lincoln and the North at times, contributing at times to the myth of Southern military superiority. His

experience as a war correspondent in Crimea in the 1850s, however, gave him an ability to sniff out facts from fiction in official military reports, so his reports to the English newspaper can generally be regarded as having some accuracy. His reporting on the Crimean War was gathered and published as an interesting history of that conflict. In addition, his diaries from 1861 to his return to England in 1863 are a valuable primary source for a foreign view of our American Civil War.

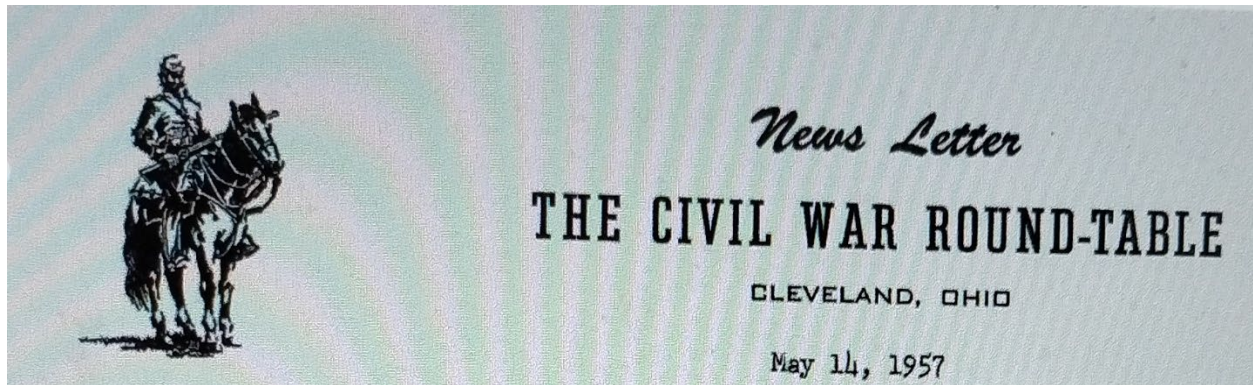
I chose this drawing for several reasons, but one particular detail that caught my attention is Russell's dog nestled asleep under his desk. For the last three and a half years I have composed the CCWRT *Charger* with our dog Rocky curled up under my desk or the table where I was working, sometimes resting his head on my feet. This year Rocky turned fourteen years old, and his health deteriorated very quickly. As I began working on this month's issue, Rocky's condition worsened, and he passed away recently. As I am finishing this column, I am missing his company under my desk. He was a "good boy" in every sense of the word and a great dog! We all miss him, but somehow, I can't help but feel a little lonely without his trusting presence near my feet. All of you who have pets, I am sure, know what I mean.

The Annual Dick Crews Memorial Debate

January 14, 2026

TOPIC: Other than Ohio, What Was the Most Important State, North or South, During the Civil War

Contact Moderator, Judge William Vodrey, for details on participation. You are not expected to be experienced in debate or do you need any specialized historical training. Participate for the fun of it and, of course, as always, VALUABLE PRIZES!



Masthead for CCWRT "News Letter" 1957

Tidbits from Old Issues of The Charger: Insights into Roundtable History

Part 2

By David A. Carrino

Part 1 of this two-part article mentions that hard copies of old issues of *The Charger* from 1956 to 2000 were scanned into PDFs by Bob Pence, and then I uploaded those PDFs onto the Roundtable's website to produce an archive of *The Charger* from 1956 to the present that is as complete as currently possible. In the process of uploading the old issues of *The Charger*, I noticed some items that I found interesting. These items provide some tidbits of historical information about the Roundtable. Part 1 of this article, which appeared in an earlier issue of *The Charger*, describes the first seven of these tidbits. Part 2 of this article describes the last of these tidbits. This tidbit is long because there is much more information in *The Charger* related to this tidbit than for the other tidbits. Moreover, the topic of this tidbit is controversial and caused some turmoil in the Roundtable. It is not the intent of this article to scratch the scab off of an old wound or to impugn anyone, but simply to present information that pertains to an extremely significant and highly consequential element of the Roundtable's history as gleaned from items in old issues of *The Charger*.

At the time of its founding, membership in the Roundtable was limited to men. This tidbit discusses that policy based on a number of items in the Roundtable's newsletter. If you take the time to read this tidbit, you will learn, as I did, about the genesis of the men-only policy and also about members' attitudes toward that policy throughout the Roundtable's history as expressed in newsletter items.

Tidbit 8: Men-only membership

When the Roundtable was formed, women were not allowed to be members. Women were permitted to

attend meetings as guests, and there was a "Ladies Night" meeting once a year, but women were excluded from membership. This provision was in the Roundtable's first constitution, as described on page six of the December 1978 *Charger* in an article titled "How I Became Interested in the Civil War." This article is by Charles Clarke, one of the founders of the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable (https://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/charger-dec_1978.pdf.) In that article, Clarke stated that during the founding of the Roundtable, he was tasked with writing "the original Cleveland CWRT Constitution," which he did. He went on to say that Kenneth Grant, another of the founders, insisted on one revision. As Clarke related in the article, "I remember Ken Grant's only objection to the draft of the Constitution was that it did not absolutely forbid women members. He wanted a clause to that effect." Evidently Grant's view won the day, because the Roundtable was open to only men when it began operation in 1957 with Grant as its first president.

The need for a Roundtable policy regarding the question of women membership was included in a letter that had been sent a few months earlier by two of the founders, John Cullen and Kenneth Grant. This letter, which was a way of gauging interest in forming a Civil War roundtable, was sent to people who Cullen and Grant thought might be interested. The text of this letter is on page five of the May 1994 *Charger* under the title "Plans for a Cleveland Civil War Round Table" (https://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/charger-may_1994.pdf.) That issue of *The Charger* contains a good bit of information about the founding of the Roundtable, including the text of this letter, in which the following is stated regarding the question of allowing women members. "The pattern of Round Table operation in other cities has been a monthly dinner meeting and, for the most part, restricted to male attendance. Whether or not ladies should be included in the Cleveland group is a question that should be decided, we've had inquiries from several individuals along that line." As discussed in the previous paragraph, this question was answered in the negative when the Roundtable's first constitution was adopted. If the information in that letter is correct, then the men-only policy of the Cleveland Roundtable was also a policy for Civil War roundtables elsewhere, and perhaps this influenced the decision in Cleveland.

Ironically, the person who was the catalyst for the founding of the Roundtable was a woman. This is described in an article by Dale Thomas about the Roundtable's history, which can be found on the website (<https://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/cleveland-civil-war-roundtable-1956-2006-2/>.) This article states that John Cullen and his wife were having dinner with another couple and also with an unnamed woman. When a Civil War topic came up, the unnamed woman asked if there was a Civil War roundtable in Cleveland. After she was told that there was not, she suggested to Cullen that he contact someone she knew in Milwaukee who could provide information about such an organization. Cullen followed up on this, and this led to the founding of the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable. Hence, it was a woman who was the catalyst for the founding of the Roundtable. Yet women were excluded from membership after the organization was formed, which was certainly a dubious way to recognize this essential contribution to the founding of the Roundtable.

As it happened, Kenneth Grant, the person who was adamant that women not be members, passed away on April 3, 1957, that is, less than two months after the Roundtable began operation. This is mentioned on page 1 of the May 1957 *Charger* in the short notice about E.T. Downer's talk (https://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/charger-may_1957.pdf.) and

is also stated on page two of the February 1967 *Charger* in an article titled "Tenth Anniversary" (https://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/charger-feb_1967.pdf.) The "Tenth Anniversary" article gives a brief description of the founding of the Roundtable. Clearly, Grant's view regarding women membership persisted after his passing. In fact, in that "Tenth Anniversary" article in the February 1967 *Charger*, the author (whose name does not appear in the article) applauds this policy by asserting, "The foresight of our Founding Fathers when drawing up our constitution has proved fantastic. Especially the part about no female membership." Obviously, Grant was not the only Roundtable member of that era who harbored a desire for a men-only organization, and this is readily apparent even 28 years later, as discussed below.

Even public reproval in *The Plain Dealer* did not sway the Roundtable from its single-gender course. On page three of the October 1984 *Charger* there is a copy of an article that appeared in *The Plain Dealer* on February 20, 1967 (https://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/charger-oct_1984.pdf.) The article in *The Plain Dealer* is titled "Where the Girls Are Not," which presumably is a play on the title of the 1960 movie *Where the Boys Are* (and also on the song of the same name from that movie). In that *Plain Dealer* article is this pointed comment: "And the original framers of the club's constitution, in their wisdom, did not forget the ladies. They barred females from membership." Page three of that October 1984 *Charger* has some text accompanying the article from *The Plain Dealer*, and this accompanying text includes some interesting statements. For example, this text indicates that the Roundtable's newsletter was exchanged with 27 other Civil War roundtables, "four of which have lady editors," and this text goes on to say, "We also know of at least four of these clubs who have lady presidents, all of whom are exceptionally good ones!" The text also suggests that opinions about women membership should be sought from members or, better still, from women who have attended meetings. But this text concludes with a deflating assertion from a Roundtable person who is described as "Our Advisor on Statistical Trivia." This advisor, without any data, "gives 10 to 1 odds that none of our ladies would want to join." Whether or not that assertion bore any resemblance to reality, the text in the October 1984 *Charger* contains a statement that refers to the question of women membership as "the now ripe subject of sharing membership with the opposite sex." It is obvious from this statement that the issue of allowing women to be members was a hot topic at that time.

Seven years prior to the emphatic assertion by the "Advisor on Statistical Trivia," something happened that may have helped to make the question of women membership a "ripe subject." This was reported in an item on page two of the February 1978 *Charger* (https://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/charger-feb_1978.pdf.) The item is headed "Repent! The End of the World Is at Hand!" This occurrence did not directly involve the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable, but it may have influenced the opinions of some members with regard to the subject of women membership. The incident in question involved the Chicago Civil War Round Table, the first Civil War roundtable to be formed (<https://www.chicagocwrt.org/history.html>.) The item in the February 1978 *Charger* that had such a dire heading was a notice that, as of December 1977, the Chicago Round Table was changing its men-only policy and was thenceforth accepting women members. Evidence that this was not perceived by the Cleveland Roundtable as a welcomed change is that the text in the February 1978 *Charger* called the report of the Chicago Round Table's decision "mournful intelligence." According to the item in the February 1978 *Charger*, the vote by the Chicago Round Table was 97 to 58 or 63% of the members voting in favor of allowing women members.

Despite the oldest Civil War roundtable taking the step of abolishing its men-only policy, the Cleveland Roundtable waited almost two more decades to put this question to a vote, and when the Cleveland Roundtable did so, it voted to do the opposite of the Chicago Round Table. The January 1995 *Charger* reported on page three that four proposed amendments were up for vote by the membership (<https://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/charger-jan-1995.pdf>.) One of these proposed amendments was to increase the allowable number of members from 75 to 100. Another proposed amendment was to prohibit members of the executive committee from being members of the annually chosen committee that nominates candidates for the officer positions. The third proposed amendment dealt with "technical and grammatical" issues in the Roundtable's constitution. The final proposed amendment was to end the policy of limiting membership to only men.

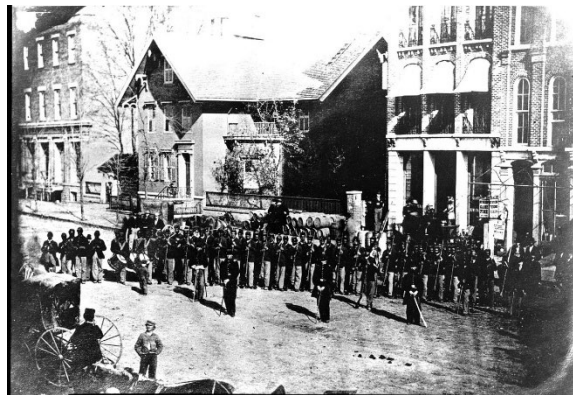
The results of the vote are on page 11 of the February 1995 *Charger* (<https://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/charger-feb-1995.pdf>.) The three proposed amendments that deal with something other than women membership all passed by wide margins (more than 90%). The proposed amendment allowing women to be members failed by a vote of 24 to 15 (that is, 62% opposed, which is just about the exact opposite of the result for the Chicago Civil War Round Table 18 years earlier). The text accompanying the report of the results of the voting thanked "all of the members who participated in the effort to modernize our constitution." Evidently, even at a time that was near the end of the 20th century, a majority of the voting members of the Roundtable felt that "to modernize our constitution" did not include extending membership to women. But before the 20th century came to an end, the Roundtable did at last modernize its constitution with regard to allowing women members. This happened in 1997 when Dan Zeiser was president, and Dick Crews (the person after whom the annual Roundtable debate is named) played an important role in bringing about this policy change (<https://www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/cleveland-civil-war-roundtable-1956-2006-2/>.)

Lastly, I want to share a personal experience that demonstrates on an individual level the consequences of the Roundtable's long-time men-only policy. During the Roundtable's 2003-2004 season, when I was the treasurer, my wife Karen was still working as a home health care nurse. One day she had a visit with an elderly woman whose name I will not reveal for privacy reasons. Karen told me that during the visit she saw many Civil War books on bookshelves in the house where this woman lived. Karen mentioned the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable to this woman, to which the woman forcefully replied that she had tried to join the Roundtable some time before and was told that membership was available only to men. Since that policy had been changed several years before this time, I paid for a membership for this woman. At that time, *The Charger* was available only as a hard copy that was delivered to members by regular mail. I figured that, if nothing else, this woman deserved to have *The Charger* mailed to her after she had been denied membership due to the men-only policy. I also went to the house where this woman lived to bring her a Cleveland Civil War Roundtable lapel pin. At that time, these pins were given to new members, but the supply of pins has long since been depleted, so that practice no longer happens.

This elderly woman was living with her daughter, and I suggested to the daughter that she could bring her mother to a meeting. However, the daughter told me that her mother was in such poor health that she did not think that that was feasible. But at least this woman was able to become a member of the Roundtable,

although, sadly, this did not happen until many years after it should have, and it happened too late for this woman to be an active participant in the Roundtable. I have a hard copy of the membership roster from 2007, which is when John Fazio was president, and this woman's name appears on that roster. The elderly woman never did make it to a meeting, which I consider one of probably many such painful and entirely avoidable consequences of the policy of prohibiting women from membership. Had this woman been allowed to join when she wanted to, she would have been able to use her interest in the Civil War and her talents to contribute to the Roundtable. She might have even become the Roundtable's first woman president. This woman and in all likelihood many women were denied the enjoyment they would have experienced but for the Roundtable's implementation of and protracted adherence to the men-only policy.

The men-only policy, which was the subject of this final tidbit, was certainly controversial, but eventually that exclusionary policy was changed. Thanks to Bob Pence, who scanned the hard copies of the old issues of the Roundtable's newsletters into PDFs, it was possible to examine the history of this controversial policy, just as it was possible to learn about some other aspects of the Roundtable's history, which are described in the other tidbits. Now that the website archive of the Roundtable's newsletter includes, as much as currently possible, all of the newsletters throughout the Roundtable's history, members are able to read about things the Roundtable has done from its earliest days to the present.



Members of 5th USCT in Sandusky, Ohio

Ohio 5th USCT Medal of Honors Recipients

By Dennis Keating

At the urging of Frederick Douglass, President Abraham Lincoln approved in the Emancipation Proclamation the entry of freed slaves into the Union armed forces. 180,000 would serve in the army, including 145 infantry regiments, although a smaller number actually served in combat. One of those regiments was the 5th U. S. Colored Troops (USCT) regiment (formerly the 127th OVI). It was commanded by Colonel Giles Waldo Shurtleff from Oberlin.

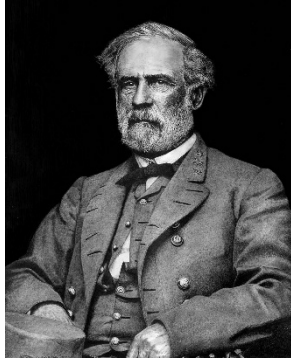
Its most serious battle was at Chaffin's Farm before New Market Heights outside Richmond, Virginia on September 29, 1864. Ben Butler's Army of the James attacked entrenched Confederates defending their capital. It was part of Alonzo Draper's Second Brigade of the Third Division of the XVIII Corps. It and other Black units charged a Texas regiment defending Fort Harrison and caused its retreat after a second assault. Amidst heavy Union casualties, all of the (White) officers of the 5th USCT were either killed or wounded. In their place, four Black sergeants led the attack: Powhatan Beaty, James Bronson, Milton Holland, and Robert Pinn. Beaty led his Company G and retrieved its flag after the death of the color bearer. Powhatan had his hat and knapsack shot away and had bullets pass through a shoe and his canteen. Having witnessed this attack, General Ben Butler awarded Medals of Honor to Powhatan and 13 other Black soldiers for their heroism.

The 5th USCT suffered 236 casualties. Of Powhatan's Company G, out of 83 enlisted men, only 16 survived the attack unwounded. Draper's brigade suffered 429 casualties. The 5th USCT participated in two other notable battles: the attack on Fort Fisher, North Carolina and the battle of the Crater outside Petersburg.

Powhatan Beaty was born into slavery in Richmond, Virginia in 1837. He and his family made it to freedom in Ohio in 1849, settling in Cincinnati. When the city was threatened by the Confederate invasion of Kentucky in 1862, Beaty worked to construct defenses for the city. When Black men were able to enlist in the Union army, he did on June 7, 1863 and was quickly promoted to Sergeant. After the war, he returned to Cincinnati, married and worked as a cabinet maker. However, his first love was acting and he performed in amateur musical and dramatic festivals. In 1888, he became the drama director of the Literary and Dramatic Club of Cincinnati. Powhatan died in 1916 and was buried in the city's Union Baptist Cemetery. In 2000, the U.S. Congress named the Interstate 895 bridge over Virginia Route 5 the Powhatan Beaty Memorial Bridge.

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General Lee and his Hen, "Nellie"

Free-Range "Nellie": Finger-Licking Good

By Brian D Kowell © October 2025

During the Civil War many soldiers and officers on both sides acquired pets. The men of the 4th Michigan Infantry tamed a wild squirrel as a pet. Company B of the 43rd Mississippi Infantry had a camel named "Douglas." The men of the 8th Wisconsin Infantry had a bald eagle named "Old Abe." The men of the 11th Pennsylvania immortalized their pet bull terrier "Sallie" on their monument at Gettysburg. Among the officers, General George A. Custer owned a number of dogs. General T.R.R. Cobb had a fighting rooster, as did the men of the 103rd Tennessee Infantry (CSA) named "Jake the Fighting Cock."¹

One of the most famous Civil War officers, General Robert E. Lee also had a pet, a hen. Lee named the chicken either "Nellie" or "Hen" depending on the source.²

After the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862, provisions were meager for the Army of Northern Virginia. A shipment of live chickens arrived by rail to the army and legend has it that John Bell Hood's Texas Brigade had first crack at the poultry. The Texans opened the cages, grabbed their "rations," and began processing the victuals. While never verified, General Lee was to have said when he witnessed or heard of the Texans' attack upon the chickens that, "A hen had to roost high to escape when Hood's Texans showed up."

However, one black hen did escape. The hen took refuge in a nearby tent where the flap had been left open. It crawled under the cot to hide. The tent happened to belong to General Lee and was discovered by the general's black mess steward, Bryan Lynch. Bryan did not know how long the hen had been there, but discovered that the hen had deposited an egg in her hiding place.³

Knowing that the general would appreciate a fresh egg for breakfast each morning, and that a fresh egg is a morale booster, Bryan decided to spare the hen.

Lee and the hen seemed to get along. The general always left the flap of his tent open for the chicken's access. The hen must have instinctively known that the general was fond of domestic

animals. “Every day, she would walk to and fro in front of his tent, and when all was quiet, walk in, find a place under his bed, and deposit her eggs, then walk out with a gratified cackle.”⁴ Bryan then gathered the egg for Lee’s breakfast. Thus, “Nellie” secured her place at headquarters.

When the army moved towards Chancellorsville to encounter the Army of the Potomac, “Nellie” chose a “roosting place in Lee’s baggage wagon.” During the battle she seemed too much disturbed to lay. But as soon as the engagement was over, she resumed her regular routine.

When the Army of Northern Virginia marched towards Gettysburg, “Nellie” went too. Again, in the chaos and cacophony of that three-day battle, the hen refused to lay. On July 4, 1863, as Lee’s army packed to retreat back to Virginia, “Nellie” was nowhere to be found. All the staff, including General Lee, searched for the fowl. To the general’s relief, just before pulling out, the hen was discovered already perched in Lee’s baggage wagon where she found a place on her own.⁵

In the winter of 1863-1864, General Lee’s headquarters was near Orange Court House. Nellie had accompanied the army in all its marches and battles for more than a year, faithfully delivering an egg each day for the general. In that time, the hen had grown fat and lazy.

In February, with food scarce, Bryan Lynch was tasked with providing a meal for an important guest that was to visit the general. During these tough times, Lynch was usually able to obtain edibles for the general’s mess during these tough times from generous civilians by pleading that the general’s health was in a poor state. According to A.L. Long’s account, all of the cook’s efforts to acquire provisions had come to naught. Unknown to Lee and his staff, Lynch had killed and prepared the chicken for dinner.

When Lee and his guest sat down for dinner, the general was very much surprised to see the table set with, among other edibles, a fine roasted chicken. All in attendance enjoyed the fine fare.

A few days later, Lee was baffled as to the whereabouts of “Nellie” and her fresh eggs. Inquiries were made of all, and when Lee confronted Lynch, he confessed that the pet had made “the great sacrifice . . . upon the alter of hospitality.” There is no record of Lee’s response.⁶

¹ Worman, Charles G., *Civil War Animal Heroes: Mascots, Pets, and War Horses*, Lynchburg, Va., Schroeder Publications, 2011.

² Hardy, Michael C., *Feeding Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia*, California, Savas Beatie, 2025, p. 105. Dasinger, Norman, Jr., “General Lee’s Pet Chicken,” *Blue and Gray Education Society.org*. June 28, 2021. Groeling, Meg, “War Chicken,” *ECW blog*, February 20, 2012. www.emergingcivilwar.com

³ Long, Armistead Lindsay, *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee*, New York, 1886, pp. 241-242. Lee’s adjutant general Walter Taylor wrote that Bryan Lynch’s name was actually Bernard Lynch, Taylor, Walter, *Four Years with General Lee*, New York, 1877, p. 228.

⁴ Hardy, *Feeding Lee’s Army*, p. 106. Freeman, Douglas S., *R.E. Lee, Vol. 1*, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936, p. 608. Dowdy, Clifford & Louis Manarian, ed., *The Wartime Papers of R.E. Lee*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1961, p. 402, 412, REL to Mrs. REL, March 6, 1863, REL Papers Library of Congress. There is a memoir by William Mack Lee who called himself Gen. Lee’s cook and writes of Lee’s chicken. William Mack Lee’s memoir is suspect. In Elizabeth Brown Pryor’s book *Reading the Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee Through His Private Letters*, Viking Press, 2007, she refutes William Mack Lee’s claims, citing that he never has been confirmed as even working for General Lee as a cook or butler. Lee, William Mack, *History of the Life of Rev. Wm. Mack Lee, BodySservant of General Robert E. Lee Through the Civil War- Cook from 1861-1865* published in 1918.

⁵ Long, *Memoirs*, pp. 241-242.

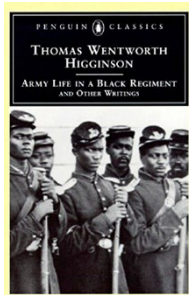
⁶ Ibid.

BOOK REVIEWS

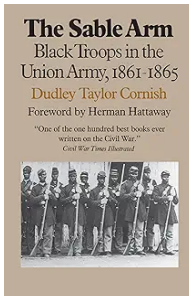
Mr. Lincoln's Sable Arm: Civil War History and the USCT

A Review Essay

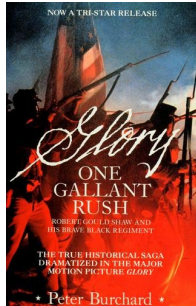
Prior to the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, American historians paid little attention to the contribution of Black soldiers to the Northern war effort during the Civil War. Except for occasional memoirs written by White officers of USCT regiments or observations by others, such as General U.S. Grant in his post-war writings, little was written about the 180,000 men who served in Black military units. When Dudley Taylor Cornish, in the mid-1950s, suggested to his graduate school advisor that he wanted to write his dissertation on the subject, he was informed that he would be wasting his time. It was argued that Blacks served only menial roles in the Union army and experienced no real combat. Besides, Cornish was told that source material for such a study was scarce, even if any existed at all. Fortunately, Cornish insisted on doing the research and uncovered a plethora of primary documents relating to recruitment efforts by the U.S. War Department for USCT regiments and subsequent actions by those regiments in combat in the field. Cornish wrote his dissertation, received a Ph.D., and his work has since become a “classic” in Civil War literature, often appearing as one of the top one hundred monographs on the history of the conflict. Since that time, many new studies have appeared. Here are five that I have found to be of interest and that are included in my library:



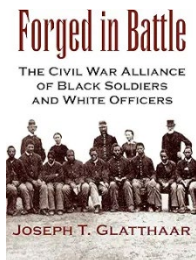
Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Edited by R.D. Madison, *Army Life in a Black Regiment and Other Writings* (Penguin Books: NY, 2002). First published in 1870, Higginson’s memoir about his service as Colonel of the 1st South Carolina Volunteer Infantry Regiment is probably the best eye-witness account of the experience of Black soldiers during the Civil War from the viewpoint of a White officer. Higginson’s life as a White officer, of course, is very different from the life of an ordinary soldier in the ranks; but Higginson writes with empathy for his men. He tries hard to convey the hardships they all suffered as well as the prejudices they had to combat from their own commanders and their enemies. The work deserves its reputation as a classic and is a good place to start when studying the USCT.



Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (University Press of Kansas, 1987). The first scholarly work published on the USCT, a classic piece of Civil War literature, and a required read for anyone trying to grasp the USCT history. Every Civil War library should have a copy.

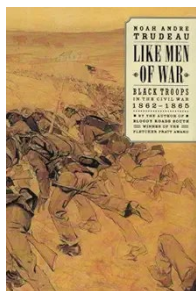


Peter Burchard, *One Gallant Rush: Robert Gould Shaw and His Brave Black Regiment* (St. Martin's Press, 1965). This was an early history of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment. Based primarily on the letters of Colonel Shaw and Shaw family archives, this book became the basis for the movie, "Glory," released in 1989. The book and its subsequent movie adaptation did much to popularize interest in the 54th Massachusetts and the USCT. It is an excellent book, well-written and well researched.



Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (LSU Press: Baton Rouge, 2000). This book contains a great deal of information on how USCT regiments were recruited, organized, and officered. During the Civil War, of course, there were prejudices that hampered any effort to have Black officers in the United States army. White soldiers, some already officers seeking higher rank and some NCOs seeking officer rank, applied for officer positions in the USCT. The prospective officers were tested and had to pass a board of review. The

War Department tried hard to get qualified men to lead USCT regiments. The interesting thing in Glatthaar's book is the way he demonstrates that both the officers and enlisted men had to face prejudice and contempt when it came to service with White troops. Ultimately, officers and men in USCT regiments had little choice in combat situations but to rely on each other, forging a relationship that had to transcend ordinary racial prejudice.



Noah Andre Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War, 1862-1865* (Little Brown & Co.: NY, 1998). Trudeau's work is my favorite book on the USCT. If you are only going to read one book on the subject, then, by all means, read this one. I have a copy of the first edition in my library. I understand that a second, updated, edition has been issued. Trudeau tries hard to cover all the bases on USCT history. There is an extensive bibliography, and he has tried to include a description of every major combat action involving units of the USCT. He is an excellent writer, and much of the book is based on primary source material and eye-witness accounts. Where he is able, he works hard to give both the enlisted men of the USCT and the officers their unique voices. This is one of the best studies of USCT history to date.

---Kent Fonner

FINIS!