SUPPLEMENT

THE CHARGER

THE CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

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[Editor's Note: The President's Message this month was submitted to me but I overlooked it in my inbox. My sincere apology for this to both President John Syroney and all of you. Please know that I will endeavor not to let that happen again. In the meantime, here is John's timely message for you all to read and enjoy. Thank you!]

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Cleveland Civil War Roundtable Members:

As mentioned previously, this year's theme is *The Battle Cry of Freedom*. I could not think of a better example of this theme than last month's speaker, Steve Magnusen, and his excellent presentation, "The Dawes Brothers."

At our October meeting, I shared how Gary Taylor and I traveled to Marietta, Ohio, in August 2024, for the dedication of the monument honoring the family home of Mary Gates and Rufus Dawes. During the ceremony, I witnessed members of the Dawes family reunite in the very church where Rufus and Mary had worshipped and prayed. As I watched this moving event unfold, I was struck by an overwhelming sense of awe at the remarkable story of the Dawes family that Steve had brought to life. I knew then that their story needed to be shared with the members of the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable.

Both Rufus and Ephraim Dawes epitomize *The Battle Cry of Freedom*. Their family's legacy of service to the cause of freedom reaches back to the American Revolution. Their grandfather, William Dawes, was one of the patriots who rode to warn the colonists of the approaching British troops on the night of April 18–19, 1775. Mary Gates's family was equally distinguished. Through her maternal Cutler ancestry, she

was connected to a family whose contributions helped shape the founding of the Northwest Territory and the establishment of Ohio University, the first university founded in the Northwest Territory, which encompassed what would become Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin.

Equally impressive was the military service both Rufus and Ephraim rendered to their country during the Civil War. Rufus, serving with the 6th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, participated in 20 engagements, including Brawner's Farm, Second Manassas, Antietam, Gettysburg, Second Fredericksburg, the Wilderness, and Spotsylvania. Ephraim also served with distinction, seeing action at Shiloh, during the Mississippi Central Railroad Campaign, at Corinth and Chattanooga, and throughout the Atlanta Campaign. His service came at a terrible cost when he was severely wounded at the Battle of Dallas in 1864.

One of the most fascinating details Steve shared concerned the sleeve chevrons awarded to veteran soldiers who reenlisted after completing three years of service. These chevrons recognized their continued commitment to the Union cause. I was particularly impressed to learn that approximately 50 percent of the men in the 6th Wisconsin and more than 75 percent of those in the 53rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry chose to continue serving their country after enduring the hardships and horrors of three years of combat. Their willingness to reenlist speaks volumes about their dedication and perseverance.

I was equally struck by the account of the reconstructive surgery Ephraim Dawes endured following his devastating wound. Most remarkable was the fact that he remained conscious for approximately 90 minutes during the procedure. His experience offers a sobering reminder of the extraordinary physical suffering Civil War soldiers endured and the remarkable resilience many demonstrated in its aftermath.

Another particularly thought-provoking part of Steve's presentation was his discussion of Rufus Dawes's emotional struggles following the war. While some historians today might interpret Rufus's experiences through the modern diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Steve presented historical evidence and perspectives informed by medical advisors suggesting that Rufus may instead have experienced what we would now describe as *survivor's guilt* or a profound sense of *survivor's obligation*. Rufus felt a continuing responsibility to care for the men who had served under his command and for their families.

It is easy to overlook the emotional burden carried by Civil War officers. Communication with soldiers' families relied heavily on letters, often requiring officers to explain the circumstances surrounding the deaths of the men under their command. Imagine the weight of having to write those letters and tell families that their loved ones would never return home. Such responsibilities help us better understand the lasting emotional toll of war and the deep sense of duty that many veterans carried long after the fighting ended.

I was also intrigued by how both brothers continued to pursue success in business despite experiencing financial setbacks associated with the economic panics of 1873 and 1893. Their experiences remind us that the challenges of military service did not end when the war was over. Veterans and their families faced additional hardships in civilian life, yet many continued forward with courage, determination, and an unwavering refusal to give up.

As we take time to remember our veterans this Veterans Day, let us reflect on the sacrifices so many have made to preserve the freedoms we enjoy today. The stories of Rufus and Ephraim Dawes remind us that the *Battle Cry of Freedom* was more than a rallying cry. It represented a lifelong commitment to duty, sacrifice, perseverance, and service to others.

Our November meeting offers another special opportunity to explore these themes with our guest speaker, Brad Gottfried, who will be presenting at several events throughout the area.

- **Tuesday, November 10, at 6:00 p.m. — Quincy Gillmore Civil War Roundtable, Elyria Public Library:** "Lee's Invasion of the North: Antietam and Gettysburg—A Comparison."
- **Wednesday, November 11 — Cleveland Civil War Roundtable:** "After Gettysburg: Race to the Potomac—Meade's Pursuit and Lee's Retreat."
- **Thursday, November 12, at 7:00 p.m. — Westlake Porter Public Library:** "Lincoln Goes to Gettysburg."

I look forward to seeing everyone at our November meeting and continuing our exploration of the people, events, and enduring lessons of the American Civil War.

Sincerely,

John Syroney

President, Cleveland Civil War Roundtable