

THE COURIER

Northeast Ohio Civil War Round Table



March 2008 Meeting #89

Date: March 11, 2008

Place: Dino's I90 & Rte. 306 exit Mentor, Ohio

Canteen: 6PM Rations: 7PM

Speaker: Brian Kowell

Topic: "A Civil War Quiz"

Reservations required please Call Steve Abbey phone 440 255 8375

E-mail: abbeysr@webtv.net

Brian Kowell, the man with a "racket," and his trusted assistant, **Peter "the Hermit" Holman** are back on our stage to test the depths of your Civil War knowledge. In a program that combines the excitement of the "Power of Ten" and "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" with wonderful cash prizes that could total more than \$1,000,000 Confederate, (or was it pesos) the membership and guests of the NEOCWRT will be challenged to beat the best effort of that other Cleveland Civil War bunch.

The affable Mr. Kowell, is a sales representative for 3M Pharmaceuticals and the resident Civil War Scholar of both that other round table and our own NEOCWRT. Brian Kowell has presented argueably some of the best programs we have had. "The Dahlgren Raid," "The General's Horse," and "The Battle for Island #10" were programs that everyone enjoyed and "The Civil War Quiz" will be no exception. It takes a really BIG SHOW to bring out Peter Holman so you don't want to miss this program! Bring a friend.

NEOCWRT Tenth Anniversary a review by Franco M. Sperrazzo, S.E.C.

“None but the Brave” attended our January 8, special 10th anniversary meeting. It was great to see and share the dinner table with Dr. Robert Eiben in such good health, and welcome his son Chip back. The only downer was founder Frank Yannucci was unable to attend for health reasons. Frank and fellow comrade George Grim could not trek from Youngstown to share in the festivities.

A special thanks to outgoing President Mike Sears who orchestrated a magnificent power point presentation. The Patton Award goes out to General Tirpak, in his relentless search of Dino’s lounge to recruit a stranger who had technical support knowledge, or else we would have been forced to implement plan B. Fellow founders Bob Baucher, Norton London and JET were stellar in their performances. Much of what we enjoyed was realized by the labor of love demonstrated by member Brent Morgan and founder Rob Bayless, who relocated to Virginia and South Carolina respectively in 2007.

JET took us through the club history by mentioning how it all began at the Dry Dock Restaurant on December 12, 1997 and subsequent meetings. The Civil War Journal class at Lakeland College in winter 1998 helped form the “Magnificent Seven” of the original 14 charter members. JET also relived our wonderful Legacy Committee Project at Willoughby Cemetery to honor those Union Soldiers who have paid the supreme price for our freedom. Sears outlined our guiding principles, membership growth, news courier and direction of NEOCWRT. Not forgotten was a moment of prayer for those who have moved on and joined our creator in the afterlife; Robert “Sig” Jansen, Dr. Robert Battisti, Conrad Sipple, and Judge Norman Fuerst.

Bob Baucher discussed highlights from our extensive archives he kept on some 7 dozen speakers we witnessed over the 10 year span. Included was a breakdown of national, regional, local presenters and our member involvement. There were countless outstanding efforts, but the Edwin C. Bearss, Oliver Schroeder, Bob Battisti, Hugh Earnhart, Will Greene, Bob Feller, Richard Sommers from the Carlyle Institute talks, along with the visual Hunley submarine discovery and Baucher and Franco “Baseball in Blue and Gray” were among the most memorable. My apologies to those not mentioned, not for lack of quality content and great achievement.

Norty chronologically reviewed the highlights of our fall overnight and spring one tank trips in unforgettable slide form. All special in their own way though Norty mentioned Shiloh often because it was first and guide Stacy Allen being so detailed appeared to be reincarnated. Before offering the Benediction, Norty reviewed the highlights of the Shenandoah Valley, Chancellorsville and Fredricksburg, Antietam, Wilderness and Spotsylvania, Gettysburg, Charleston, Petersburg twice (2003 hurricane). On to Richmond for 2008!

In his closing remarks Bill Meissner, our new Presidente profiled the next 20 years. If you were not present, sorry it will take 10 more years to eyewitness such a momentous occasion. Raise your glasses to salute our history and those who lived it!

Why the Irish Fought by Ted Karle

This essay discusses the motivation of the Irish military units in the Civil War. No other military units shared similar “mind-sets”. The Irish fought with a “heart and hand” and with derring-do that sprang from their very ethnicity. Ireland was a country that knew struggle and the Irishman knew war. The 19th Century Irishman came to America seeking not only a new life, but new status as well. The burden of his character was, in fact, his Irish character. He had to live up to a set of imbued cultural-specific expectations not only for himself, but also for “Daughter-America” and “Mother Ireland”. He came to flee oppression and advance himself. He knew he had to earn whatever he was to achieve.

For centuries the Irish were “clannish.” Each family group (or sept) had a bard or “stanachie,” (a poet storyteller), who ranked second in status to the family chieftain. Many family histories contain assertions of family position by a resort to arms. Stanachies passed the exploits of the family from generation to generation. Accounts exist of over 200 Irish battles dating from 5200 BC. In more modern times, by 1860, there were another 200 battles. The Irish fought among themselves, against the Vikings, the Normans, the lowland Scots and the English. American Civil War Irish fighting units were an extension of this cultural past.

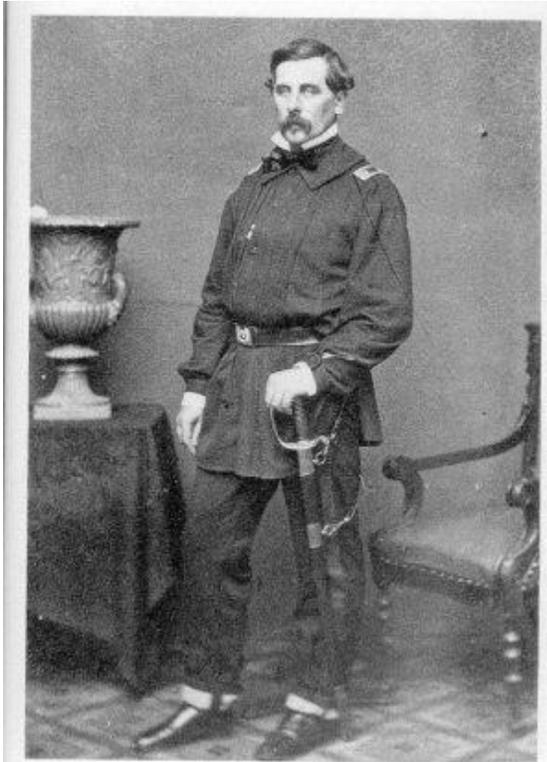
The Irishman knew he was a second class citizen in Ireland and in America. In his homeland, he was oppressed by a foreign power. In America, he was discriminated against by his neighbors. He resented his lack of status. The first Norman/English invader of his country, Strongbow, in the 12th century, was resisted with steel. The next four hundred years, brought repeated English attempts to destroy Irish culture. After several wars, ruling families were systematically dispossessed of their land. Penal laws were imposed on the Irish that forbade the practice of the Catholic or dissenting religions. The Irish rights to inherit or to buy and sell land were limited. Irish children could not be educated in the home, in schools or abroad. Catholic Irish were denied political office and the right to practice in the professions of law or medicine. The English law prescribed Irish dress, and hairstyle. It forbade the owning of weapons or of owing a horse over a certain value. The Irish had to take English names such as Brown and Greene, and the Gaelic tongue was outlawed. By 1695, Irish-Catholic families owned only 7% of the land in Ireland. Over 700 years of oppression in Ireland was indelibly inscribed on Irishman now living in America. His new freedom gave him a valued opportunity to contribute to a new order.

The American Revolutionary War provided an opportunity for the Irishman of all creeds in America to strike the old foe. They proved excellent revolutionaries in their new country. George Washington wrote, “May the **Kingdom of Ireland** merit a stripe in the American Standard.” He declared St. Patrick’s Day a holiday at his Morsetown camp in 1780, “as an act of solidarity with (the) Irish in their fight for independence...” The **Marquis de Lafayette** in 1779, praised the contributions of the Irish to the American Revolution. The first military units sent by France to aid the America were from the French Irish Brigade under Walsh, Dillon and Roche. Sixteen American generals were from Ireland, including Generals Moylan, Montgomery, Sullivan, and Knox. Commodore John Barry, an Irishman, became “Father of the American Navy”. George Grieve in his “*Travels in North America, in the Years 1780, 1781 and 1782*” wrote, “On more than one imminent occasion, Congress owed their existence, and America possibly her preservation, to the fidelity and firmness of the Irish.” Nine signers of the Declaration of Independence and four of the Constitution were of Irish heritage.

Following our Revolution, Catholic and non-Catholic Irish returned to second-class citizenship here. The wartime respect they had earned was short lived. Scot-Irish settled the Ohio and Southern frontiers. Other Irish were fit for hard labor of digging canals to make a prosperous America. In the 1840’s, as more destitute Irish arrived, the victims of an English genocide called the “Great Famine, American ‘nativists’ formed a political movement (the Know Nothing Party) to harass the Irish. By the time of our Civil War, Irishmen had laid the tracks for America’s railroads, were policing America’s cities, fighting

its fires, and owning its saloons. Employment opportunities were limited by “NINA”, that is, “No Irish Need Apply.” As Irish strength grew in America, nativists continued to ostracize the Irish as “Micks.”

As the Irish struggled for a new life in America, they were thankful for the opportunities this country provided. However, they never forgot their “Mother Ireland”. Many hoped to return there someday or to help Ireland cast off the English yoke. Militant Irishmen joined a secret Irish revolutionary brotherhood that had its “circles” in both America and Ireland. This group, founded here in 1858, was called the “Fenians.” Its avowed purpose was to over-throw British rule of Ireland. Michael Corcoran, one of its founders, headed its military branch (The Phoenix Brigade); he was also Colonel in the New York 69th Militia. In 1860, Corcoran refused to permit the regiment to march in New York City’s welcome parade for the Duke of York, the future King of England. Corcoran’s court martial was dropped when the Civil War began.



Thomas Francis Meagher had an extensive uniform wardrobe. He probably designed this outfit for field use. (Michael J. McAfee Collection)

The Confederacy was not the foe the Fenians envisioned fighting. But Corcoran advised the Fenians to stay ready, while the 69th volunteered for Federal service. He addressed the group, “We will not be the worse for a little practice, which we engage in, with the more heart because we feel it will be serviceable on other fields (by “other fields” they knew he meant, Ireland).” **Captain Thomas Francis Meagher** (pronounced Mahar), perhaps the most well known Irishman in America, joined the 69th raising his own company. Meagher was a revolutionary condemned to death in 1848 by the Crown and upon much public protest, exiled to Tasmania (Australia) from where he escaped to America. The 69th with Corcoran and Meagher fought well at Bull Run. Corcoran was captured. Upon exchange, he founded in 1862, Corcoran’s Irish Legion consisting of four New York up-state Irish regiments that served throughout the War.

Meagher formed the American Irish Brigade in the fall of 1861. Through political maneuverings he received approval for the unit and became its first commander. Meagher wrote of the first duty of Irishmen was to preserve the Union over Ireland’s freedom. “The Republic (America) gave us an asylum and an honorable career...is threatened with disruption...it is the duty to

prevent such a calamity...us Irish...who aspire to establish a similar form of government in our native land...it is our duty to America, but also to Ireland ...to preserve their (American) institutions from destruction...(we) cannot either spare sympathy, arms, or men for any other cause (i.e. Ireland’s).” Meagher armed the Irish Brigade with smooth-bore muskets that fired devastating “buck and ball” for the close-in fighting. The unit was “shot to hell” by 1863.

The concept of an “**Irish Brigade**” was well known to Meagher and American Irishmen long before our Civil War. Three Irish regiments had served the Kings of Spain from 1585 to 1818. In 1688, James II of England sent 5,000 Irish recruits to France in exchange for 5,000 French troops. These expatriates became an integral part of the French Army for the next 104 years until the brigade was disbanded in 1792. Another 11,000 Irish soldiers, the cream of Patrick Sarfield’s Irish army were voluntarily exiled to the European continent in 1691 rather than be subjugated to English order. This was at the end of the Williamite War (James II verses William III of Orange), as a part of the terms negotiated with the English for the surrender of the City of Limerick. (For the record, the English Parliament failed to honor that treaty regarding Irish-Catholic liberties.) Henceforth, Sarfield’s troops were called “The wild geese.”

Their descendants proudly served European rulers in countless battles in red uniforms under green flags in the "Irish Brigade."

Meagher's American Irish Brigade adopted the traditions of their exiled brothers who fought in European service. One of the Brigade's battle cries was "Remember Fontenoy" where in the War of Austrian Succession (1745), the French Irish Brigade's bayonet charge sent the English-Hanoverian attack reeling; it saved the French army. The Irish Brigade bested the Germans at Melazza and won at Cremona, Italy. The Brigade was one of the finest fighting forces in Europe.

Like their European cousins, American Irish Brigade members shared the romantic notion of someday returning to Ireland to fight "the sessenah." ("the strangers" as the English are called in Gaelic). Meagher wrote, "that many of our countrymen who enlist in this struggle for the maintenance of the Union will fall in the contest. But, even so; I hold that if only one in ten of us come back when this war is over, the military experience gained by that one will be of more service in a fight for Ireland's freedom than would that of the entire ten as they are now."

Many American Irish regiments had officers and privates that had served with the British army in the Crimean War. A third of the 88th New York possessed such experience. Its Colonel Denis F. Burke looked forward to the day when he could "lead the remnant of the 88th to share in striking a stunning blow for the freedom of our dear old mother land."



The Irish Brigade's lived up to its expectations. The Brigade's green flags were always welcome on the field by regiments of the Army of the Potomac. At Fredericksburg the Irish Brigade soldiers charged the Wall without its green banners but with sprigs of green boxwood in their kepis. Their dead and wounded were piled in front of the Wall. The next day Meagher, held a banquet in Fredericksburg commemorating the arrival of the new brigade flags...a gift of a WASP committee of grateful New York businessmen and politicians. The banquet held in a theater under Confederate shellfire, was a bitter statement against troops being used by politicians and generals alike.

(The

Irish Brigade at Marye's Heights, Fredericksburg, Va., Dec. 13, 1862 by Don Troiani)

The Irish had volunteered in large numbers for their new country. They felt betrayed and targeted when conscription came in 1863. They were at the top of the list to be drafted. As a result, Irish enlistment dropped as their martial ardor had been exploited once again by others. In 1864, the Brigade was "re-constituted" with recruits and fought until the end of the War. It was always able to find fierce fighting. It was at Bull Run, Gaines Mills, Chancellorsville, the Wall at Fredericksburg, the Sunken Road at Antietam, the Wheatfield and at the Bloody Angle at Gettysburg (the 116th Pennsylvania). In the end, the Irish Brigade was also in McLean's yard at Appomattox, Virginia.

Religion was another element that played a major role in the motivation and psyche of Irish regiments who shared the Catholic faith. Three chaplains served the Irish Brigade. Soldiers cleared their consciences before battle and went forth ready to die. **Father William Corby's** (later, the 3rd President of

Notre Dame University, hence the schools motto, “**The Fighting Irish.**”) granting of general absolution to brigade troops at Gettysburg is well documented.

The Union Army had over 20 predominately Irish regiments and the Confederate army had a dozen of such regiments. About 160,000 Irish served in the War. Southern Irish were against Union impositions on their freedom. Fenians were in both armies and much of the general Irish population shared Fenian sympathies. Occasionally, when the Irish units fought each other, they saluted their enemies with the Celtic “hal loo ooo”. In the Atlanta Campaign under a flag of truce, Union General Thomas Sweeney approached Confederate Patrick Cleburne to join the Fenians. Cleburne after consideration responded “After the war closed both of them would have had fighting enough to satisfy them for the rest of their lives.” Cleburne was killed in action leading a charge at Franklin, Tennessee.

Irish Brigade regiments were the 69th, 88th, and 63rd New York State Volunteers; other units included the 25th and 29th Massachusetts, and 116th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry. The Brigade fought in all the major campaigns of the Army of the Potomac. It lost over 4,000 men during the War. This total is larger than the number of soldiers who served in the Brigade at any single time. Eleven Brigade members were awarded the Medal of Honor. Of the five officers who commanded the Brigade, three were killed or mortally wounded. The Brigade was mustered-out in June of 1865...having fought with “heart and hand” for their adopted land.

The fighting record and the contribution of Irish regiments serving both Union and Confederate causes are well documented. The Irishman’s cultural background provided him with a unique motivation to fight patriotically for his chosen causes.

The Irish Brigade received its first flags in ceremonies at the front of Archbishop Hughes’ home in New York City. Judge Charles Daly addressed the Brigade as follows, “you...have designated yourselves by the proudest name in Irish military annals...that of the **Irish Brigade**...(in) selection of such a name...the officers and men should remember that if any part of the glory which the Irish Brigade achieved...is to descend upon them, it will not be by adopting its name, but by proving hereafter, by their discipline and by their deeds, that they are worthy to bear it.” The record shows that American Irish troops were indeed, worthy of their Irish heritage.



(Father William Corby photograph from the Notre Dame University Archives)

Notes from the editor: John Sandy

Happy Saint Patrick's Day from the editor and staff writers of The Courier: Ted Karle, Francis Sperrazzio, Joe Tirpak, Tom Horvath and John Sandy

One Man Great Enough by John Waugh Book Review by Tom Horvath

Many of you have probably already read the latest book by Jack Waugh (who spoke at our December meeting). *One Man Great Enough* studies Lincoln's life prior to the Civil War. For those who have not already read it and are interested in Lincoln, let me recommend it.

Perhaps I've read more about Lincoln's early years than I thought, because there was little in the first part of the book that was new. But keep going, because once Mr. Waugh gets beyond Lincoln's early years, I found a lot of new information.

Particularly interesting is Lincoln's relationship with Stephen Douglas. Many people know that the two men were acquainted early on, that both spent time in the company of Mary Todd, that Douglas was Lincoln's opponents in both the 1858 senatorial election and the 1860 presidential election, and, of course, that they faced one another in the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates. Those facts justify spending pages on Stephen Douglas's life, which Mr. Waugh does. But there is much more to their relationship.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act, which Douglas authored, was a major factor in bringing the slavery issue to a head. Prior to the famous debates, Lincoln and Douglas debated each other frequently -- contesting that act and other issues. Those debates propelled Lincoln into greater prominence in Illinois.

Many of the steps Lincoln took at the beginning of the war were unprecedented and controversial. As an important leader of the Democratic Party, Douglas's reaction to Lincoln's initial actions greatly influenced how Congress would react. Had Congress balked or resisted, the conduct of the war might have been much different and much more difficult.

One of the pluses of this volume is bringing Douglas into sharper focus. He still stands in Lincoln's shadow, but his role is shown to be much more than Lincoln's foil.

If you are interested in Lincoln during the war years, this book is not for you. It stops just as the war is beginning. Nor does it have much new information about his private life. But if fleshing out Lincoln as a lawyer and politician (prior to the presidential years) is of interest, by all means, pick up this volume.

Like *The Class of 1846*, this book reads easily. It is longer (421 pages) than it looks, includes an index and appropriate footnotes, and a few pages of photos. The book retails at \$28.00 and is available on Amazon for \$18.48. Check with Mike Sears, as he may have a copy or two at an even more reasonable price (and with no shipping charge). Though the Mentor Library does not own a copy, the CLEVNET library network has 23 copies.