THE DIRECTOR'S PAGE

Cincinnati and the Civil War

There is no more pathetic a figure than the resident Civil War devotee who has a passion for military lore. He may justly exclaim the celebrated cry of anguish of the boxing manager: "We wuz robbed!" For the fact is, he is without a battlefield! The best he can do to satiate his appetite for military exploits is to retrace the trail of the "ubiquitous" raider, John Morgan; or perambulate through the neighboring hills of Covington where the citizen army of "Squirrel Hunters" entrenched themselves in 1862 in anticipation of Kirby Smith's assault. Both affairs are table scraps by Civil War standards. A trip to Camp Dennison might raise the buff's martial spirits. Yet, how can anyone work up enthusiasm for a training camp where the only maneuvering took place before the call for meals, and the only blood spilled came as a result of a slip in shaving. He could, of course, make a "pilgrimage" to Proctor and Gamble's Civil War site and spend an afternoon tracing the positions of workmen of old in the process of manufacturing soap and candles for the Union armies of the west. Such simulation, however, would call for a high degree of mental projection, perhaps more than the average buff is able to perform. It would also be extremely hazardous, since this area is now traversed by a main arterial! No, to the ardent Round Tabler the Civil War seemingly by-passed Cincinnati; in a sense, Morgan's Raid of 1863 is symbolic. He must direct his attention to Manassas, Vicksburg, Shiloh, Gettysburg and other "glory" (or "gory?") centers of the internecine struggle.

Having said this, we are faced with a question of some pertinence: How can the Society justify sponsoring an exhibit at the Taft Museum (April 14–September 4) titled: "Cincinnati and the Civil War?" What on earth could we possibly exhibit that would not be contrived to the point of distortion? The title itself would seem to be a contradiction in terms — that is, if one regards the Civil War purely in the context of military exploits.

Happily, the Society does not conceive of the Civil War as an era to be remembered solely for its epic-like military engagements. It views the struggle in a broader frame of reference, encompassing, for example, industrial developments, the sacrificial efforts
of citizenry, and intellectual achievements. Seen in broader perspective, Cincinnati was as important an area as any blood-drenched battlefield. Indeed, Cincinnati has much to commemorate, much to reflect upon.

Our exhibit has a two-fold aim. Initially, it provides a visual account of important events in Cincinnati’s history during a critical period of the national existence. This is in keeping with our institutional character — i.e., a regional historical society. Cincinnati’s location gave a unique turn to its historical development in these troubled times. War had an immediacy that was not felt in communities farther to the north. Slavery, for example, was not a shibboleth to a Cincinnatian — it was as close to him as the Ohio River. On another plane, a peacetime industrial complex was quickly converted into a bustling war manufacturing center. A large portion of the military supplies that ultimately proved to be the great determinant of victory was produced in this city. And Cincinnati produced even more — it produced ideas, which frequently have a more penetrating (and devastating) effect than bullets. In Lane Theological Seminary, to cite one prominent example, abolitionist ideas were forged and heated to a lead-white intensity in the pre-War debates; later, they were driven deep into the vitals of the slavery argument. Moreover, in this frenetically active intellectual environment there resided a precocious young lady who was to write a book that would place the institution of slavery before the forum of world opinion; and who was to receive the greatest reward a writer could hope for — literary immortality.

A second purpose of our exhibit is to educate viewers on the deeper significance of the Civil War experience; to remove the event from a parochial yoke, as it were, and allow it to range over a more universal field of meaning. An effort has been made, for example, to depict the grandeur of man in moments of high crisis. In establishing this theme, we have not been motivated by a purely partisan spirit. The fact that we emphasize the noble and valorous actions of Cincinnatians is not to be construed to mean that such values were indigenous to this community. Quite the contrary, we seek to convey that they are inherent among all manner of men, be they Indians contending against cavalrymen, Londoners during the “blitz,” Russians before the Nazi hordes at Stalingrad, Southerners on the fields of Antietam. Cincinnatians
of the Civil War period held no monopoly on the qualities of personal valor and self-sacrifice. (Indeed, there is considerable proof that many were under the sway of base instincts.) We simply underscore the fact that such qualities were in evidence, and imply that they are commendable and worthy of emulation.

Recently, Mrs. Buckner Anderson, a life-long resident of Cincinnati and a valued member of our Society, presented to us two letters written by her grandmother (Sarah Blossom Carlisle) during the crisis of 1862, when it appeared that Confederate forces had embarked on a campaign to capture Cincinnati.* At first reading, the letters appear most significant for their autobiographical revelations — they depict the despair experienced by a mother who is compelled by circumstance to make some rather monumental decisions affecting the welfare of her family; the letters are addressed to her husband away on business.

They also have considerable historical significance. They reveal a citizenry transfixed with fear. Southern forces were on the move and there appeared to be no obstacle in their path. The fall of Cincinnati seemed imminent. The first impulse of the citizenry is to pack up the silver and run. But gradually the fear subsides, then disappears, to be replaced by a resolute determination to defend the city. The mob falls under the influence of a singular few who transcend themselves above fear; who make a commitment to higher principles than self-preservation and self-interest; who come to experience, in Churchillian vernacular, “their finest hour.” Let the documents relate the facts:

July 27, 1862

I never bid you good bye with such a heavy heart as I did when you left this time. I felt that the news from Kentucky was very discouraging, and that you as well as myself had long believed that there was a secret organization, throughout the state waiting for the right moment to present itself, when a general uprising would take place. McClellan was defeated before Richmond, and it seemed that now was the time, and Morgan began his move on the Great Chess Board. already he was reported to be advancing on Lexington with rapid

strides, and how soon would he be on the banks of the Ohio and threaten our city, and we entirely defenceless. There never was so good a time if Morgan only knew it, for him to come and sack and pillage the city, because we had nothing to do with, but we could talk, and there was plenty of it done. It did seem to me that you ought to have waited a few days longer, you had so much at stake, or you ought to have authorised John to have given some money to assist in the defence of the city if needed; but you went disbelieving any danger was near, and laughing at the rumours.

Well, Wednesday, and Thursday the city was all excitement, and rumours. Friday the Telegraph reported that he, Morgan, had taken Cynthiana, and that they had fired 2 rounds after the surrender on our troops. John came in at 1 oclock, very much excited and said I had better get ready to leave at any rate to pack up the Silver and send it to New York, he said a great many persons were going with their families. I told him I would wait until next day, and in the meantime I would get matters arranged so I could leave very soon if necessary, that he had better get some money ready so I could have it without any delay, he said some of the merchants were sending off all their available funds. He went home to dinner, as soon as we were through dinner, Harriet came in all excitement, Mr. C. had come home and told her to pack up and leave that night if possible, or the next morning. She said I must go too, I told her I would wait until next day, and go the next night (Saturday), she said Mr. C. said there would be so many going, the cars would not hold all the people. I said I had 2 Carriages and 3 horses, and I could go with them, but I would wait a little longer, she went home, and I sat down to think, if I had known where to telegraph you I should have done so, but you seemed so little disposed to tell the children when they asked you where you were going, that I did not venture to ask you, you would always say to them “you did not know.” I always hoped I never should go through with what I did after the Fall of Ft. Sumpter when you were away, but these few days were quite as bad, Everybody exclaimed when John or I, had to say you were away —

When John came in on Friday to tell me to pack up, he brought your letter from Chicago making so light of the reports, it seemed to us too bad to get such a letter at such a time, it was as much as I could do to restrain my tears, it seemed the one drop too much. Well the evening despatches were more favourable and Saturday morning still better, though there was no doubt of the capture of Cynthiana but
by this time Morgan discovered that the country was getting
to hot for him and began to retire. Judge Ware of Cy, our city
Solicitor’s Father was killed during the battle. Fannie had
not left for Urbana but was to leave Saturday, she wanted
to stay and be with me to help, but she was very unwell and I
insisted upon her going, I would have one less to take
care of. Maria was still at Mr. Harrisons. I brought her home
on Monday. There were a great many meetings held, and
tried to raise money to get up companies to defend the city,
and to increase the bounty for recruits, Probasco offered
to give 500, 50, apiece for recruits, Elsas 500 and 2 or 3 other
gave large sums. The citizens tried to raise 75,000 or 100,000
but did not succeed, the immediate danger is over and they
have all gone to sleep again, it is sickening to hear people
talk about putting down this rebellion, “kill all the rebels,
show no mercy to man, woman or child, hang them all,” is
their constant cry; but if you ask for money to help or to
defend their own city, where every thing they have got in the
world is, they have no money to spare, or the[y] have given,
they say. Well so they have, they must give and give again
a hundred times if necessary, I dont think our Revolu-
tionary Fathers, talked and acted thus! We must act not talk.

I got a letter from Florence the Sunday after the excite-
ment, she wanted to come down and share the danger with
us, and told me to get her money out of bank principal and
interest, she said “it would amount to 7,46, and give it to
help make up the sum of 75,000 they were trying to raise,
here, it was but little but every little help.” I give you her
exact words That is true, patriotism for you, willing to
give her all! it ought to put us all to shame.

August 10, 1862

Since I wrote you last our city seems to be thoroughgly
awake and aroused to meet the foe. The city is being carefully
canvassed for subscriptions for the volunteer or bounty fund,
you were appointed on[e] of the collectors in this district,
as you were absent John was appointed to fill your place,
he has been at it all the week, Mr. Hooper was with
him John and [I] talked it over what you ought to give,
we concluded to put you down for a 1,000 and after asking
him what cash I had on hand I told him to put me down for
500, I thought I could not put my money to a better pur-
pose it was or is well laid out for my children. I hope
you will be satisfied with what we done.

There has been collected so far, 125,367,50, the Com.
feel very much encouraged.
There are times when Man recognizes the delusion of living solely on the basis of self-interest. Is there not a value to be derived from reading documents of this sort?

We cordially invite our members, as well as the public at large, to the spring exhibit. We have no battlefields on display. We merely have an interesting story to relate. We hope to arrest your mind as well as your eye.

L. L. T.