

# THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

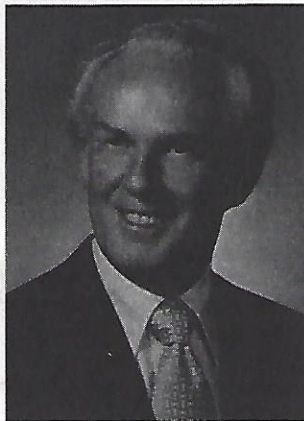
Volume XXXVIII, Number 5

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January 1978

## SHERMAN LAVIGNA ON GENERAL BENJAMIN FRANKLIN BUTLER—BEAST OR BENEFACITOR?

Was Benjamin F. Butler the "beast" he has so long been regarded, or was he possibly a "benefactor"? This is the question Sherman Lavigna will consider when he addresses The Round Table on January 13. Butler was born in New Hampshire, attended college in Maine, and became a lawyer, a career in which he enjoyed outstanding success. Soon after the outbreak of the Civil War, because of his political prominence he was appointed a major general of volunteers and in the first year held several commands in the east, including Fort Monroe, Virginia. Although showing no great military ability, he became quite prominent because of his declaration that slaves within Union lines were "contraband of war".

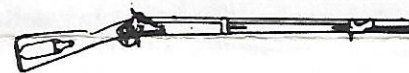


Sherman Lavigna

In March, 1862, he assumed command of the Department of the Gulf, and on May 1 officially took over as administrator of New Orleans. It was there that he earned the nickname "Beast Butler" because of the strict orders he issued. As a result of his alleged tyrannical rule, Confederate President Jefferson Davis issued a proclamation calling Butler a "felon, an outlaw, and a common enemy of mankind." If captured, Davis ordered, he was not to be considered a military prisoner; instead, he was to be hanged immediately. Others, however, mainly Northerners, mitigated the charges. They pointed out, for example, that Butler did succeed in such tasks as cleaning up the city and restoring order.

Late in 1863, Butler took command of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina, and even there he remained a controversial figure. He participated in the 1864 campaign to take Richmond, but his failures led to growing demands that he be relieved. This action was finally taken by Grant on January 7, 1865. Following the war Butler served in the House of Representatives where he was active in the impeachment of Johnson. He was elected governor of Massachusetts in 1882, and later ran unsuccessfully as Greenback candidate for president.

Of Butler, Mr. Lavigna says, "he was cunning, courageous, and never hesitated to use his political influence which extended even to the office of President Lincoln. He likewise had no compunction about changing



367th REGULAR MEETING

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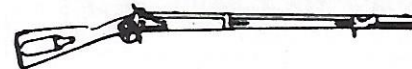
SHERMAN LAVIGNA  
on  
Benjamin Franklin Butler:  
Beast or Benefactor  
Friday, January 13, 1978

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Chicago Bar Association,  
29 South LaSalle Street

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m.

Dinner at 6:30 p.m.



political party affiliations whenever it suited his purpose." Of his talk, he explains, "my presentation will attempt to evaluate General Butler's legal, political, and military careers. Perhaps I can succeed in giving The Round Table members some reasons to temper their feelings toward Butler, or I may merely add more fuel to the fire of hatred which still glows whenever the name 'Beast Butler' is mentioned."

Sherman Lavigna, a native of Cleveland, Ohio, grew up surrounded by the Civil War stories of his grandmother whose father had fought with an Ohio Regiment. Unfortunately, he learned later that his grandmother's tales were either highly colored or created out of her imagination. "Nevertheless," he says, "she did succeed in instilling within me a life-long interest in the Civil War."

Mr. Lavigna's family moved to Chicago where he attended public school and the Northwestern University School of Commerce. He spent most of his working life in the insurance business, retiring in 1974. Currently, he lives in Battle Creek, Michigan, where he continues to pursue his interest in building a Civil War research library. He is a charter member and past president of the Battle Creek Civil War Round Table and has spoken to Round Tables in Milwaukee, Jackson, Mississippi, and Detroit. This will be his first talk to our Round Table.



# THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



FOUNDED DECEMBER 3, 1940

18 East Chestnut Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60611

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The only requirement for membership in The Round Table is a genuine interest in the Civil War and its era. For information, address Ward C. Smidl, 1104 Whippoorwill Lane, Palatine, Illinois 60067.



Retired Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall, military historian and author of over thirty books, passed away on December 19, 1977 in El Paso, Texas at the age of 77. A native of New York State, General Marshall joined the Army in 1917 and served as a Second Lieutenant in the Infantry until 1922. He then resigned his commission and, for the next twenty years, was a newspaper journalist. Rejoining the Army in 1942, his subsequent service included the establishment of the U.S. Army News, the founding of the U.S. Army Historical Division, and the positions of Chief Historian of the European Theater and Historian of the Berlin Airlift and Korean War. He also acted as an observer of the conflicts in the Belgian Congo, Lebanon, and Viet Nam. Among his published works were many critiques and articles on Civil War operations.

## from the Editor's pen



On many occasions we have devoted this column to a plea to our own, as well as other Round Tables, to become involved in various projects designed to further or safeguard the study of the events of 1861-1865. Among these have been battlefield preservation, the National Civil War Sites Fund, restoration of monuments and markers, and, of course, our own Research Center. While it is not our purpose here to judge either the success of these pleas, or of the projects themselves, we feel it is safe to say that one of the major problems each of these programs has faced was their dependence on the giving of either funds or of substantial time by those who were called upon to assist. Each of these most valuable commodities is in extremely short supply in today's world.

Now we would like to put before you another idea, one that, unlike the others, requires very little time and almost no money. Yet, we think that this project is equally, if not more, important than any of the others already mentioned. It goes to the very heart of our mutual avocation and, if adopted, will make for those who come after us the study of "our war" that much more complete.

As each of us knows all too well, every theory regarding the Civil War era, political and military, is not down on paper between the covers of a published work. Not every conscientious interpreter of these century old events is a Shelby Foote or a Bruce Catton. And this truth goes beyond facts and ideas, for it extends to places, to memories of people many of us have only heard about, and to countless other facets of Civil War historiography. For example, not every battlefield is a Gettysburg with a monument every ten feet to tell us "This is where..." or "That is where..." For every Gettysburg there are two Kernstown's, where no physical evidence is left to point out the position from which the tragic Garnett retreated, only to incur Stonewall's ire. And how many of us were privileged to sit with a Douglas Southall Freeman, a Lloyd Lewis, an Allen Nevins and hear the priceless stories of the paths down which their research led them.

However, there is still left to us a resource which will, if preserved, fill those many gaps for us and for those who follow. However, like the energy that runs our country, this resource too is being steadily depleted and so we must begin to conserve it now. The resource is the human mind and the means of conservation is the tape recorder. It is as simple as that.

For every unmarked battlefield there is someone who knows its history and its terrain as well as each of us knows the path to our kitchen at half time of the Bears game. For every Lloyd Lewis, there is a Ralph Newman who knows and remembers every thought and method of the great historians who have gone all too soon. What better way to preserve the heritage of the Civil War than to walk the fields of Brandy Station recording every word of Col. Seabourne or than to tape the human interest tales of Gettysburg as only Jacob Sheads can relate them. Just imagine what we would have if we had only thought to do this with a J. Ambler Johnston or a Glenn Tucker. With them it is sadly too late, for many others it is not.

In every Round Table, near every battlefield, there is someone who has much to pass on. We call upon all Round Tables to appoint committees to seek out these people and to ask them to share their knowledge with the recorder. And once this is done, the tapes should be duplicated and copies placed in Park Service headquarters, libraries, historical societies, and even our Research Center, so that students, both serious and casual, can benefit from the experience and knowledge that otherwise, because of the mortality of man, will be lost forever.



## December Meeting

An in-depth discussion examining Lincoln's performance as administrator of the federal government, by Dr. Lewis Croce, was the reward for the 44 members and guests who braved the cold and snow to attend The Round Table meeting on December 9.

As Dr. Croce pointed out, Lincoln came to national power without experience in government administration, either in Washington or Illinois. When he assumed the Presidency, he had not even been to Washington since 1848, and when there he had only been a congressman with no exposure to the executive branch. In fact, until his pre-inauguration visit with Buchanan, Lincoln had never spoken with an incumbent president. The remoteness of Lincoln from the Presidency before his taking office is still unique in United States history.

According to Dr. Croce, Lincoln's first objective as president was not to save the Union, but to obtain the power to run the country. Only when he was recognized as the leader of those who wished to save the Union could he deal with those who wished to dissolve it. Although he did not invoke his Commander-in-Chief powers until after the fall of Fort Sumter, doing so did give him some administrative control. However, as Dr. Croce pointed out, there is a definite distinction between Lincoln as a military leader and as an administrative leader.

In examining Lincoln's administration, Dr. Croce said planning, organization, command, and control are the major factors to be considered. When he came to office, Lincoln had no real plan for the civil administration, and no preconceived ideas. In addition, his actions had no unity of purpose and he did not maintain an orderly schedule. While he inquired into departmental affairs, he did not exercise control in those areas in which he was not primarily interested, and he had no effective staff to keep him posted. As to command, Lincoln spent his efforts in directing the army, thus giving negligible attention to Interior, the department of government which at the time had the most employees.

By raising, and then answering, a series of questions, Dr. Croce sought to assess Lincoln as an administrator. Did he seek first-rate men to assist in his administration? No. Geographical and political considerations governed his choices. None of the members of his cabinet were chosen for administrative ability or experience in government. Did Lincoln give his cabinet authority to perform their jobs? He let some secretaries have free reign, but bridled others, and usually let others take the blame for his errors or failures to act. This was, however, out of a desire to protect the integrity of the Presidential office and not a result of any intention to preserve his own reputation.

Was Lincoln responsive to public demand for policy changes? He was not overly influenced by setbacks at the polling booth, such as in 1862. But, although he did not respond to public opinion, he did appear to anticipate it, and flow with it. Was Lincoln flexible in his administrative policy? Yes, except when there was a conflict with his strongly held ideas, or with his military powers. Was Lincoln a stable leader? He steadily acquired stability and was at the height of his power when he was assassinated. In considering Lincoln's leadership, Dr. Croce pointed out that he did not hesitate to take the initiative in major areas. However, he was never so far ahead of public opinion that he appeared a dictator.

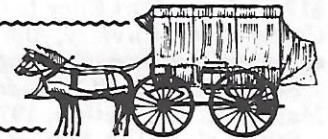
Overall, Dr. Croce feels Lincoln escaped criticism as an administrator because he won the war. However, there was never clockwork efficiency in his government, there was considerable duplication of effort, and he never utilized his cabinet properly. Although he thus cannot be classified as a great administrator, when the problems he faced are considered, it is a wonder the government ran at all. Lincoln, unlike Jefferson and Jackson, left no system of

## TO THE CAMPFOLLOWERS (LADIES)

With the eligibility of women for membership in The Round Table, the Campfollowers have now officially disbanded. Many of the ladies will be joining the men at regular Round Table meetings in the near future. The staff of the Newsletter would like to express its sincere appreciation to Margaret April for her leadership of the Campfollowers and for her splendid articles which have filled this space for the past several years. To the membership of our "ladies auxiliary" we give our heartfelt thanks for their support and valuable assistance.

Because we felt the official publication of The Round Table was not the place for it, and because the staff was sharply divided in its opinions, we have, during the recent balloting, avoided all editorial comments in the Newsletter on the issue of membership for women. Therefore, it is without such comment of any kind that we pass on to the ladies the remarks of Mrs. Zetna Andrews, the guiding light of the Jackson, Mississippi C. W. R. T. and the editor of its outstanding newsletter, "The Rebel Yell." After announcing the results of our recent vote, in her December issue, Zetna went on to say: "The wives of CWRT members (and other women) had an organization of their own called "The Campfollowers"—held their own meetings, planned their programs, etc. and we have a feeling some were as saddened by the vote as those 58 oldtimers were in voting "Nay". They always sounded like they had fun—numerous times we were tempted to catch the "Old Chicago" train and join them for a meeting. Take a tip from us SOUTHERN GALS—don't try to take over and do things UNLESS they ASK you to—you'll get along FINE."

## The SUTLER'S WAGON



Once again we announce the opening of the Sutler's Wagon and, as always, its inventory depends on you. This is your column. If you have any announcements to make, books or artifacts to buy or sell, research information needed, etc., just let us know by writing us at 18 East Chestnut Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611, or by calling your editor at 332-5060. The only qualification is that your notice must be Civil War related. There is, of course, no charge, so you can't beat the price. The Sutler will stay in business only as long as you want him to, so step right up and tell us what we're going to do for you.

government, because he had none. And yet, Dr. Croce concluded, he was the greatest political leader in our history and elevated the Presidency to unprecedented influence in national affairs.

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Our own member, Bill Sullivan, has advised us that two valuable artifacts were recently stolen from museums in the East. Taken from the Hopewell (New Jersey) Museum was a Civil War Officer's Tiffany saber and scabbard. The blade of the saber is marked "Collins and Company, Hartford," and the scabbard is inscribed "Presented to Lt. Col. S. W. Stryker by the Officers of the 1st and 2nd Battalion, 18th Regt. Calvary N.Y. Volunteers Nov. 17, 1863." Missing from the New York Historical Society is an engraved Map Horn (Powder Horn) which originally belonged to Phineas Bunting in 1761. The horn, which shows Albany, Lake George and surrounding area, is 12½ inches long, and bears the identifying mark "X.177." If either of these items are offered to you for sale, you should immediately notify your local police or the respective museum. It is only with the cooperation of the prospective buying public that thefts such as this can be prevented.



## THE NEW BOOKS



(Compiled by Dick Clark)

Alotta, Robert I. *Stop the Evil*. San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1977. \$12.95. Story of Private William H. Howe, a young Pennsylvanian executed during the Civil War as the object lesson needed by Sec. War Stanton.

Carroll, John M., editor. *Custer in the Civil War*. San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1977. \$27.50. First reprint of Custer's War Memoirs, originally published in 1876. Plus Custer's official reports, plus bibliography of Custer in the Civil War, etc.

Davis, Burke, *Our Incredible Civil War*. 2nd printing. New York: Ballantine Books, 1977. pbk. \$1.75

Fleet, Betsy and John D.P. Fuller, eds. *Green Mount: A Virginia Plantation Family during the Civil War*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977. \$12.50. Reprint of original done by Univ. Kentucky, 1962.

Fuller, Claud E. and Richard D. Steuart. *Firearms of the Confederacy*. Lawrence, Mass.: Quarterman Publication, 1977. \$25.00. Reprint of 1944 publication.

Lawson, Don. *The United States in the Civil War*. Illustrated with photos, maps and drawings by Robert F. McCullough. New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1977. \$6.95. For young people.

Reedstrom, Ernest L. *Bugles, Banners, and War Bonnets*. Edited by Don Russell. Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, 1977. Maps, facsimiles, illustrations, index. \$17.95. From Fort Riley to the Little Big Horn. A study of Custer's 7th Cavalry, the soldiers, their weapons and equipment. Fine pictorial material.

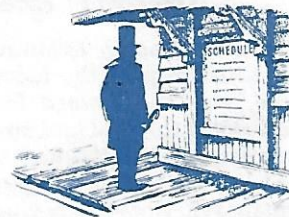
Schildt, John W. *Roads to Gettysburg*. Chewsville, Maryland: The Author, 1978. \$18.00.

Silbey, Joel H. *A Respectable Minority*. The Democratic Party in the Civil War era, 1860-1868. New York: Norton, c1977. Paperback \$10.95

Stedman, Charles Ellery. *The Civil War Sketchbook of Charles Ellery Stedman, Surgeon, United States Navy*. Ed.: Jim Dan Hill. San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1977. \$24.95

United States Congress. Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. *Red River Expedition*. Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus Reprint Co., 1977. \$25.00. Pbk \$19.00. Reprinted from vol. 2 of the report printed by the Government Printing Office in 1865.

The Massachusetts Historical Society has discovered, among a stack of documents donated by an unidentified Florida lady, a letter which the Society's director claims is the most complete contemporary account of Abraham Lincoln's last hours. The letter was written on April 16, 1865, the day after Lincoln died, by Augustus Clark, a War Department employee, who resided in a rooming house near Ford's Theater. In the document, Clark describes to his uncle how he rushed to the theater on the night of April 14th after hearing the commotion and the news that the President had been shot. He claims to have reached the inside of the President's Box to find Lincoln lying on the floor with his wife, Mary, nearby shrieking and moaning. Clark allegedly helped carry the President to the Petersen House. The letter then goes on to describe the events of the next several hours, including Lincoln's medical condition and rapidly decreasing pulse rate, the efforts and opinions of the doctors called to the scene, the arrivals of the various government officials, and the activities of Mary Lincoln as she kept the death watch, including the fact that she fainted twice during the evening. Clark claims to have remained in the death room all night. According to the



## BULLETIN BOARD

### FUTURE MEETINGS

Regular Meetings are held at the Chicago Bar Association, 29 South LaSalle, second Friday in each month except as noted.

January 13: Sherman Lavigna on "Benjamin Franklin Butler: Beast or Benefactor".

February 10: Dr. Thomas Buckley on "Naval Modernization and the Civil War".

March 10: Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr. on "Civil War Chaplains".

April 14: Marshall D. Krolick on "Brandy Station".

May 3-7: Annual Battlefield Tour to Chancellorsville, Wilderness, Fredericksburg, etc.

May 12: Kenneth Carley on "The Sioux Uprising of 1862".

June 9: Nevins-Freeman Award Dinner and Installation of Officers.

Every Monday: Informal noon luncheon meetings at Wieboldt's Men's Grill, 9th Floor, State and Madison; all members welcome.

### NEW MEMBERS

W. Frank Meacham, Jr., 1103 Drake Terrace, Prospect Heights, Illinois 60070.

Stan Buckles, 117 W. Jasper Street, Mt. Pulaski, Illinois 62548.

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Joyce Warshaw, 1319 Crain Street, Evanston, Illinois 60202.

### CHANGES OF ADDRESS

Anthony Primack, R. R. #2, Actamount, Illinois 62411.

letter, a fragment of linen still enclosed with it is actually a part of a towel soaked with Lincoln's blood. While the letter contains little information that was not already known, it appears, if genuine, to be the most complete, single document review of the events from the time Lincoln was shot until his death.

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The Richmond National Battlefield Park, of the National Park Service, has published a new brochure entitled "On to Richmond." Because of the extensive interstate highway construction in the Mechanicsville Beaver Dam Creek area, the previous maps and guidebooks, such as the excellent one done by J. Ambler Johnston, can no longer be relied upon. Therefore, this new booklet will be of great benefit in locating the sites of the Richmond Campaigns of 1862 and 1864.