

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

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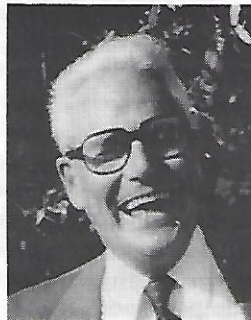
February, 1988

Dr. William Hanchett on Abraham Lincoln—Man In The Middle

by C. Robert Douglas

Although he died a martyr, Abraham Lincoln during his lifetime found himself more hated than loved. Northerners as well as Southerners hated him for trying to force the Southern states to remain in the Union, for casting aside precious constitutional rights, for lowering public esteem for the office of President, for shedding so much blood, for widowing so many women, and for being responsible for so many homes without fathers. This hatred permeated the minds of otherwise decent and patriotic people, so that it was almost an inevitability that some among them would be driven to near madness through the changes that his actions and policies were causing in the nation.

On February 12, 1988, Dr. William Hanchett, professor of history at San Diego State University, will address The Round Table and present his views on Lincoln's political position as the war years rolled on, as well as his plight as the focal point of hatreds expressed in both the North and the South, a situation that made him vulnerable



Dr. William Hanchett

to either kidnapping or assassination. His extensive research on this topic resulted in his book, *The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies*, published in 1983.

In his remarks, Dr. Hanchett will discuss the ultimate assassin of Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth, and the psychology behind Booth that resulted in his plot to kill Lincoln. A member of a family prominent in American theatre, Booth at first appeared destined to take his place alongside his father and brothers as foremost figures on the American stage. Up until the summer of 1864, his dramatic career soared while he became progressively obsessed with the belief that the South was an oppressed nation, threatened by the actions of abolitionists, who in turn were traitors to the founding fathers of this country. In August-September, 1864, he decided that he had to take more drastic measures to alter the plight of the South. If the release of Confederate soldiers languishing in Northern prisoner-of-war camps could be effected, it would balance out the North's superiority of manpower, thus guaranteeing victory and independence for the Confederacy. He decided to try to kidnap Lincoln, demanding for the President's ransom the release of the prisoners. He recruited John Surratt and several



468th Regular Meeting

Dr. William Hanchett
on
Abraham Lincoln—
Man In The Middle

Friday, February 12, 1988

Quality Inn
Halsted and Madison
Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.
\$15.00 per person
Entree: Chicken Vesuvio, Fish, or Fruit Plate



others for his plot to intercept Lincoln on one of his trips to the Soldier's Home outside Washington, whisk him through southern Maryland to a waiting boat on the lower Potomac and on to Richmond. An attempt on March 17, 1865 failed and another effort on March 29th came to naught. When he stopped for his mail at Ford's Theatre on the morning of April 14th and learned that both Lincoln and Grant, as well as their wives, were planning to attend that evening's performance of the popular comedy, "Our American Cousin," he put into action plans to assassinate Lincoln, Grant, Vice President Andrew Johnson, Secretary of State William Seward and possibly Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. Through this, he would save the South by bringing down the government, leaving the country without its leaders and totally bewildered.

Dr. Hanchett secured both his master's and doctoral degrees from the University of California, Berkeley. His professional experience includes service as historian with the United States Air Force (1952-54), and history professorships at the University of Colorado (1954-55) and Colorado State University (1955-56), before taking up his

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THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Founded December 3, 1940

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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 John Peterson, 18 E. Chestnut St., Chicago, Illinois 60611.



Dr. Mark E. Neely, Jr., will review Jean Baker's book, *Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography*, at the Books-Between-Bites program at the United Methodist Church, 8 N. Batavia Ave., Batavia, Illinois on February 18. The time is 12 noon.

That same evening, Dr. Neely will address a meeting of Batavia citizens at the Congregational Church, 21 S. Batavia, on the subject of Mary Todd Lincoln. This program, which begins at 7:30, will be sponsored by the Batavia Heritage Committee. Both programs are open to the public.

Battlefield Preservation Report

by Daniel J. Josephs

The Chantilly (Ox Hill) Battlefield area in Fairfax County, Virginia was facing possible extinction due to the extensive development of the area around Washington D.C., which has threatened a number of battlefield areas in Virginia. However, some progress in preserving parts of Chantilly have been made.

The Chantilly area was the scene of vicious fighting between Confederates led by General Thomas (Stonewall) Jackson and Union troops under Generals Phillip Kearny and Isaac Stevens. In late August, 1862 after the Confederate victory at Second Bull Run, General Robert E. Lee sent Jackson on a flank march to attempt to cut off the Union army under General John Pope retreating toward Washington, D.C. Aggressive attacks at Chantilly by Union Generals Kearny and Stevens, both of whom died in the battle, helped stop Jackson's flanking movement.

According to the Chantilly Battlefield Association newsletter of October, 1987, most of the Confederate positions in this battle have already been lost due to the construction of commercial developments, townhouses and a street named Monument Drive. The Association is currently negotiating with the Milton Development Company to construct a linear park along Monument Drive, according to Bryan Pohanka of the Association. Edward Wenzel of the Association states that there are plans to raise funds to construct a confederate soldiers monument to complement the already-existing monuments commemorating Generals Kearny and Stevens.

In 1915 John Ballard, a Confederate veteran, donated a small parcel of land (50 x 100 feet) at the site of General Stevens' death. On October 2, 1915 the 1st New Jersey Brigade Society dedicated monuments commemorating Generals Kearny and Stevens. In the original commercial development plan these monuments were to be relocated to an area 300 yards north of the Confederate line. After much publicity this plan was abandoned. Land along West Ox Road, including the area of the monuments, was then rezoned with the provision that the Milton Development Company and the Centennial Development Co. would each donate an acre of land for the purposes of the preservation of the area. Centennial Development Co. donated a 2.3 acre parcel of land, (called parcel 6) surrounding the monuments to create a battlefield park. Centennial has agreed to develop a plan to landscape the park and work with the Chantilly Battlefield Association to develop it, according to Mr. Wenzel.

A private individual owns a parcel of land of about 2.5 acres, called parcel 5, located adjacent to the southern boundary of the proposed park. According to Mr. Wenzel, this land owner has refused to sell to the local commercial developers and would be willing to sell the land to Fairfax County at a reasonable price so that it could be included in the battlefield park.

The Association has approached Fairfax County to purchase parcel 5 and to take over and manage parcel 6. Up until the recent election this past fall, there was very little interest on the part of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. According to Nancy Brown, an aide to newly elected County Chairman Audrey Moore, "The climate has been improving to preserve a portion of Ox Hill and the David Stewart home" which is a historic home in the area. The problem, according to Ms. Brown, is the availability of

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January Meeting

by Barbara Hughett

What caused Americans, for four long and bloody years, to kill each other? In seeking answers to this question, fellow Round Table member James C. Vlazny looked at the life of one person whose political career spanned the period from 1826-1876. On January 8th, 125 members and guests gathered for the 467th regular meeting of The Civil War Round Table, to hear Jim speak on "Robert Barnwell Rhett: Father of Secession." As he began his talk, he pointed out that, "What it means to be an American today was determined in 1861-65." Before that time, many people deemed state citizenship the more important identification. They thought of themselves primarily as Illinoisans, South Carolinians, etc. It was the Civil War that made us Americans.

Robert Barnwell Rhett, born on December 21, 1800 in Buford, South Carolina (the population of which was 90% slaves at the time), a descendant of one of the founders of Charleston, South Carolina, represented the planter aristocracy who held all the power in the South. He was educated in South Carolina and began a lucrative law practice in the 1820s. The important issues for Rhett included states' rights, opposition to the Federal government's tariffs on imports, the sanctity of slavery, and the continuance of Southern culture. He never altered his views on any of these issues throughout his long life. He was not a compromiser who could change and grow with the flow of history. Instead, he chose the role of agitator, seeking to keep South Carolina and the South as it was, at all costs, including secession from the Union, which he first proposed as early as 1828, during his opposition to the "Tariff of Abomination." He held firm to his views and to his role of fiery agitator. "Sometimes," Jim noted, "the sparks in the fire would die down a little, and he'd keep pouring oil on it." And he kept at it for 32 years, until time and events brought others in the South around to his way of thinking.

Rhett served as a representative to the South Carolina legislature, as U.S. congressman for 12 years, and was appointed to the late John C. Calhoun's Senate seat in 1850. Throughout this time, he kept hammering away for his causes and advocating disunion, if what he saw as the rights of the South were not met. In 1836, his brother-in-law bought the *Charleston Mercury*, which became an organ for Rhett's opinions for many years. In 1844, he started the Bluffton Movement, which sought to take South Carolina out of the Union. An excerpt from a speech he gave in support of this movement reads as follows: "All that is needed is that the issue be made with the general government. And one state is, in my opinion, as able to do this—both on the subject of the tariff and abolition—as a half-dozen states. In our revolution, no assemblage of the colonies was held until the tea was thrown overboard in Boston Harbor. And so it can be again. What we want is that the tea shall be thrown overboard!" In an 1850 speech on "The Dangers of Emancipation," he said, "The emancipation of slaves would terminate in amalgamation of the black race or extermination of the white race. Shall the African rule the earth? No. We will not be governed by the African, nor will we be governed by the Yankee. We must secede."

In protest of the acceptance of The Compromise of 1850, dealing with slavery in the territories, in 1852, he resigned his Senate seat. Also in 1852, his beloved wife, Elizabeth, who had been a somewhat tempering influence on Rhett, died while giving birth to their 12th child. Shaken by these events, Rhett, who was very family-oriented and

considered himself to be a religious man, retired from public life for six years. This period ended in 1858, when he and his son became sole owners of the *Mercury*, and he and William Lowndes Yancey, of Alabama, started their work of planning for the 1860 Democratic convention. Their subsequent successful attempt to split the Democratic party virtually assured a Republican victory. The headline on page one of the *Mercury* after Lincoln's election read: "The Tea Is Thrown Overboard. The Revolution Of 1860 Has Begun."

Although Rhett had his hour of triumph when South Carolina seceded in December of 1860, his hopes for a position of real power in the Confederacy were soon dashed. As Jim observed, "Revolutions are made by revolutionists, not run by revolutionists." More stable, calmer people are usually called upon to lead. While he was rejected by the Davis administration for the higher position he desired, he did have a voice. He served in the provisional Confederate Congress and was chairman of their Committee on Foreign Relations. And he used his powerful and influential newspaper to spread his views, and often to attack the Davis administration and Jefferson Davis, personally, whom he called "incompetent" and "a half-hearted Confederate."

After the war, he spent a few months near the end of 1865 in a place called "Castle Dismal" in Alabama. He then returned to Charleston, never regretting his views or the part he played in splitting his country asunder, never asking the government for a pardon, resisting change to the very end. In his research, Jim Vlazny came upon a manuscript written by Rhett shortly before his death in 1876. It was titled "Northern Culture," and Jim called it "99 pages of vile hatred" directed against the North and anything or anyone who disagreed with the beliefs of Robert Barnwell Rhett.

The tenth annual meeting of the Confederate Historical Institute will be held in Portsmouth, Virginia April 7-10. The emphasis will be on Civil War naval history and will feature talks by Dr. William N. Still, William C. Davis and Ed Bearss, among others. There will also be tours of the Portsmouth Naval Museum, Fortress Monroe and Hampton Roads. On Sunday, April 10, Ed Bearss will lead an optional tour of "The Seven Days" at an additional cost of \$45. The \$175 registration fee (\$10 discount if paid by March 20) includes meals, sessions, and tours, but not lodging which is available at the Holiday Inn Waterfront at \$48 per night. For further information, contact Civil War Round Table Associates, P.O. Box 7388, Little Rock, AR 72217.

The remains of a Confederate fort and two acres of land surrounding it were recently donated to Chesterfield County, Virginia by Hill Development Corp. County drafting and design technician George L. Fickett, Jr. was able to convince the president of the corporation to reroute a road around the site, even though this delayed the development six to nine months and meant that two fewer lots could be developed. The fort was part of the Howlett Line, a series of trenches built by Confederate troops in May, 1864, after the Battle of Drewry's Bluff. The county has not decided what to do with the land, but may erect a sign to identify the fort.

The New Books

compiled by Dick Clark



Coulling, Mary P. *The Lee Girls*. Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 1987. \$19.95.

Current, Richard Nelson. *Arguing with Historians: Essays on the Historical and the Unhistorical*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987. \$19.95.

Grebner, Constantin. "We Were the Ninth": *A History of the Ninth Regiment, Ohio Volunteer Infantry April 17, 1861, to June 7, 1864*. Translated and edited by Frederic Trautmann. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1987. \$24.00.

McLean, James L., Jr. *Cutler's Brigade at Gettysburg*. Baltimore, MD: Butternut and Blue, 1987. \$30.00.

McLean, James L., Jr. and Judy W. McLean. *Gettysburg Sources*. Volume I. Compiled by... Baltimore, MD: Butternut and Blue, 1986. \$20.00. Made up of photoreprints of earlier material.

McLean, James L., Jr., and Judy W. McLean. *Gettysburg Sources*. Volume II. Baltimore, MD: Butternut and Blue, 1987. \$23.50.

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funds to purchase parcel 5. The only source of funds would be County park authority general obligation bonds approved by a public referendum; there are no such bonds approved now for this purpose. Another factor to be considered is the business brought into Fairfax County by this commercial development, according to Ms. Brown. The Battlefield Association was scheduled to meet with Chairman Moore at the end of January to discuss parcels 5 and 6.

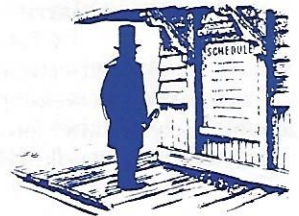
One historical issue which has received more support from the County in the past is the David Stewart home, which was saved from demolition. There are currently plans to relocate the home to a neutral site and restore the home. According to Mr. Wenzel, the Association would like the home relocated to the battlefield park to be used as a visitor's center and museum.

At the current time parcel 6, which is 2.3 acres, is going to be used as a battlefield park to be managed by the Centennial Development Co. The monuments to Generals Stevens and Kearny are going to be left in their present location at the site of General Stevens' death. The issue of parcel 5, the linear park, and the David Stewart home must still be resolved. You can indicate your support of the preservation of Chantilly by writing to Chantilly Battlefield Association, P.O. Box 3828, Fairfax, Virginia 22038.

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present post at San Diego State in 1956. In addition to *The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies*, his major publications include *The Transformation of America*, co-edited with Richard T. Ruetten (1963), and *Irish: Charles G. Halpine in Civil War America* (1970). Important articles relating to our field of interest include: "The War Department and Booth's Abduction Plot," *Lincoln Herald* (Winter, 1980); "The Eisen-schmiel Thesis," *Civil War History* (September, 1979); "Booth's Diary," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (February, 1979); and "Abraham Lincoln and Father Abraham," *North American Review* (March, 1966).

BULLETIN BOARD



Future meetings

Regular meetings are held at the Quality Inn, Halsted and Madison, the second Friday in each month, except as noted.

February 12: Dr. William Hanchett on "Abraham Lincoln—Man In The Middle."

March 11: Harold Holzer on "The Confederate Image: Prints of the Lost Cause."

April 8: Michael Snyder on "The Battle of Seven Pines."

April 28-May 1: Annual Battlefield Tour: Chancellorsville.

May 13: Gerald F. Linderman on "The Experience of Combat in the Civil War."

June 10: Edward Longacre on "The Army of the James."

New members

Roy R. DiNovo, 10432 Linus Ln., Oak Lawn, IL 60453 (312) 423-4764.

Robert C. Stoller, 1550 N. Northwest Highway, Suite 401, Park Ridge, IL 60068 (312) 827-4848.

Joseph F. Unger, 1601 Habberton, Park Ridge, IL 60068 (312) 825-4175.

A "scenic zone" around the Antietam National Battlefield has been proposed by the superintendent of that park, Richard Rambur. His idea is more far-reaching than a proposed buffer zone being developed locally by a special advisory committee appointed by the Washington County (Maryland) Commissioners in that it could be used to limit or regulate development on property in direct view of the battlefield, regardless of how far away it is. Rambur says of Antietam, "This is a very rare piece of ground." Every year we keep it the way it is, it becomes more valuable in its own right. It's a perfectly preserved battlefield.

Dennis Frye of the Save Historic Antietam Foundation requests concerned Round Table members to write letters to the Hagerstown *Morning Herald* and the Hagerstown *Daily Mail* expressing support for Rambur's scenic protection plan. This will help apply pressure to local politicians. Write: Editor, Hagerstown *Morning Herald*, 100 Summit Ave., Hagerstown, MD 21740 and Editor, Hagerstown *Daily Mail*, at the same address. Dennis would appreciate copies of your letters; send them to him at Harpers Ferry National Park, P.O. Box 65, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425.

We have learned that the Maryland Court of Special Appeals has upheld the rezoning of the Grove Farm at Antietam from agricultural and conservation to commercial uses. This opens the way for a shopping center to be built there. The rezoning had been overturned by a Washington County Circuit Judge, but the Special Appeals court said the appeal was not filed in a timely manner. County regulations require appeals to be filed within 30 days after a rezoning decision, but the owners of the Grove Farm did not file until more than seven months later. The case could be appealed to the Maryland Court of Appeals.