

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

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February, 1981

GERHARD P. CLAUSIUS ON THE DRAMA OF MARY TODD LINCOLN

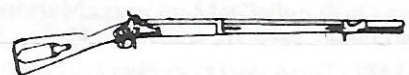
The members and guests who attend The Round Table meeting on February 13 are certain to have an enjoyable evening. First, they will be able to visit with past president, fellow member and good friend Gerhard P. Clausius — or “Doc” as he is affectionately known. Second, they will be able to hear him speak on a subject about which he feels strongly, Mary Todd Lincoln.

No study of the life of Abraham Lincoln can avoid Mary Todd Lincoln, the woman in the life of our Civil War president, Doc maintains. She is, in his opinion, a tragic figure who for many years was considered a shrew. But closer study brings out that she was indeed in need of sympathy; she was a sick person who in our modern age would have been aided by new medications and psychiatric counseling. Doc intends to treat her with compassion in his talk in the hopes that his hearers will be more sympathetic toward her.

“Doc” Clausius, who joined The Round Table in 1954, served as president in 1962. He was born in Chicago of immigrant parents and thus has no ancestral connection with the Civil War. His interest in the War was stirred when his parents, who, he points out, like many naturalized Americans were extremely patriotic, took him to the annual “Decoration Day” parades which were held on Michigan Avenue. Doc says he was thrilled by the sight of the old soldiers and the music of their fife and drum corps, and he became curious as to what kind of war they had fought in. (At first, he says, he thought it was called the “silver war” and had something to do with money, a scarce commodity in his home.)

Doc worked his way through Illinois College of Optometry (he practiced in Belvidere, Illinois), and, he reports, although his time was then taken up with learning his profession, he still held the little spark in his mind concerning Lincoln, Grant, Lee, Shiloh, Vicksburg, Gettysburg, Appomattox, etc. He says, “Whenever I had a little time to spare from anatomy, physiology, and other weighty scientific subjects, I would sit in some library and lose myself in the period of history I enjoyed most. I owned very few books at the time, and the libraries filled my yearning to gain information on the ‘great war’”.

When people in Belvidere heard of his interest in the Civil War and Lincoln, Doc was called upon to speak at PTAs, service clubs, and church groups. To date, he reports, he has given 159 talks locally and throughout the midwest, including to the Rockford, Peoria, Salt Creek, Kansas City, Fort Wayne, Calumet, Decatur, and, of course, Chicago Round Tables. He last spoke here in 1970 on Stephen Hurlbut.



398th REGULAR MEETING

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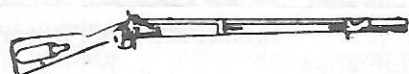
GERHARD P. CLAUSIUS
ON
THE DRAMA OF MARY TODD LINCOLN

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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 1981

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Como Inn
546 N. Milwaukee
Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.



Members are reminded that they must make reservations (by returning the reservation card or by calling the Book Shop) no later than 5 p.m. the day preceding the meeting. Last month about 20 people either called on Friday to say they would attend, or just showed up at the door. This obviously creates a severe strain on the Como Inn, especially with regard to food preparation.

Doc is the author of several newspaper articles as well as an article in the Illinois State Historical Society Journal (Winter, 1958). Most recently, he published “Mr. Lincoln Goes to Gettysburg,” *Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin Bulletin* #35. In addition to his membership in The Round Table, he is a member of the Chicago, Boone County, Kentucky, Vicksburg, Illinois State and Duneland Historical Societies.

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



FOUNDED DECEMBER 3, 1940

18 East Chesnut Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611
Phone: (312) 944-3085

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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.



The third annual Confederate Historical Institute will be held in Biloxi, Mississippi, April 2-5, 1981. Headquarters for the meeting will be the Beauvoir Mansion and Shrine. Among the featured speakers will be Dr. Grady McWhiney of the University of Alabama; and Col. Joseph E. Mitchell, commander-in-chief of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, talking on Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston. For further information, contact Civil War Round Table Associates, PO Box 7388, Little Rock, Arkansas 72217.

VER LYNN "DOC" SPRAGUE

1911-1981

By Ralph G. Newman

"He was born with the gift of laughter and a belief that the world was mad." The author who wrote this could properly have been referring to Ver Lynn "Doc" Sprague, who became a member of The Civil War Round Table in 1960 and served as president for the 1967-1968 term.

His was a rare sense of humor and good fellowship. Among his delightful "projects" was an attempt to have President Eisenhower pardon the unknown horse thief who stole Abraham Lincoln's horse just before he was discharged as a soldier in the Black Hawk War and the picketing of the Wisconsin Travel Bureau with pretty girls carrying signs reading "When Abraham Lincoln went to Wisconsin, his horse was stolen—vacation in Illinois. As a poet, he did not rival Keats or Shelley but made us feel light of heart.

Ver Lynn passed away in the early hours of Tuesday, January 6, at the Naples Community Hospital, Naples, Florida. It is ironic that he died on the 103rd anniversary of the birth of Carl Sandburg, whom he admired so much.

He was born in upstate New York and received his formal education at Hartford College and at Syracuse University before becoming a Methodist minister, serving metropolitan New York churches for nine years. He left the ministry to enter the army in World War II, after which he became an executive officer in the medical rehabilitation division of the Veteran's Administration.

During the 1950s and early 1960s he held positions in advertising, sales and public relations in the Chicago area, and established a national reputation as a public speaker and business trainer. He was a dedicated student of the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. He started visiting the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop in about 1955 and we became close friends. In the February, 1976, *Newsletter* he published the findings of his inquiries among members of the CWRT and other students of the great conflict, which resulted in his "Ten Title Civil War Library."

Ver Lynn was one of the first consultants on tourism for the State of Illinois, active in the creation of the Lincoln Heritage Foundation, and I was happy, in my capacity as chairman of the Illinois Sesquicentennial Commission, to name him as director of the commission. During the period between 1966 and 1969 he helped organize over 2,000 events held throughout the 102 counties of Illinois and made at least a thousand speeches. It resulted, with the help of other CWRT members who joined the Sesquicentennial staff (Jerry Warshaw, Joyce Warshaw, Mal Hoffmann, Don Russell, Paul Angle, Miner Coburn, Win Stracke, and others) in what has been acclaimed as the greatest celebration ever held by a state and the only commission in Illinois history which returned money to the state.

After the Illinois Sesquicentennial, he moved to Naples, Florida. He became owner, with his wife Eleanor, of the Driftwood Realty Company, was active on the Naples Board of Realtors, and the Marco Board of Realtors. He was a member of the National Speakers Association and the Florida State Realtors Speakers Corporation. He was co-founder of The Civil War Round Table of Southwest Florida. He was a lecturer on real estate, business, and historical topics at the state and national level.

Ver Lynn is survived by his wife, Eleanor, and three daughters, his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Sprague of

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JANUARY MEETING

The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, which was created in December 1861, "to enquire into the conduct of the present war," was Howard C. Westwood's subject when he addressed the 86 members and guests who attended The Round Table meeting on January 9. Specifically he sought to set the record straight about the purposes and work of that committee.

Creation of the committee by Congress was a true watershed in our constitutional history, Mr. Westwood explained. For the first time ever the President's power to conduct a war had been challenged. At the beginning of the Civil War Congress had simply ratified Lincoln's actions, and not even the rout at Bull Run had moved the legislative branch to action. But, by the time it reconvened on December 2, their mood had changed.

A large Union army had now been mobilized, but it seemed to be inert. In addition, the approach to Washington by water had been cut off and a Union force had been decimated at Ball's Bluff. The Senate wanted an accounting. The result was a resolution creating the joint committee which was approved almost without dissent—33-3. It was then approved in the House without debate or dissent. By this action, Mr. Westwood, said, Congress had decided it would enquire into the past, present and future of the war. It has never inserted itself so broadly before or since to monitor the chief executive.

Some historians have alleged that the committee intruded on the Executive's domain, that it was guilty of faulty reports, and that it was anti-administration and was trying to take over. (The most notable historian who dealt with the committee, and with whom Westwood took considerable issue regarding both facts and interpretation, was T. Harry Williams). However, Westwood, maintained these judgments are inaccurate.

Only a bare majority of the committee was made up of radical republicans, and, thus it was not a mere instrument of the radical republicans. In addition, contrary to popular belief, the committee and the executive were not at loggerheads. A rapport was established between them at the outset and close contact was maintained. Most importantly, no reports critical of Lincoln were ever issued. This was true even during the volatile period of the 1864 election year when criticism of the President could have had a major effect.

In addition to these inaccurate judgments, Westwood also pointed out some mistakes of fact that have been perpetuated by historians like Williams. For example, Williams maintained that the committee, by omitting part of Grant's testimony supporting Meade, tried to get Meade deposed for his decision not to send in the black troops at The Crater. However, Westwood says, the full quote was included. Also, Williams maintained that the committee delayed investigating cost overruns in the Navy for political reasons. In fact, however, Westwood said, they proceeded as soon as they were instructed to by Congress—right after it reconvened. The committee was always inactive during Congressional recesses.

Westwood said that one of Williams' major mistakes was assuming that whatever Ben Wade did could be attributed to the committee since he was chairman. But, the committee was not subservient and on numerous occasions demonstrated it was not a rubber stamp. Also, nearly every committee report was presented in draft by Wade and usually modified by the other members. The committee was not a puppet.

The real importance of the committee, in Westwood's opinion, is the safety valve function it served. The north was subject to severe tensions during the war and Lincoln had to keep the ship of state afloat despite waves of controversy emanating from Congress. The committee provided a forum to air complaints and charges. Instead of ill-informed debate in the halls of Congress, charges could be turned over to the committee for investigation. It provided a means of transferring oversight from the partisans in Congress to a bipartisan group and contributed to keeping in bounds the governing of the Civil War. Westwood said a similar committee was proposed in the south late in the war; had there been such a committee many of their internal problems and disagreements may have been alleviated.

Westwood said the radical reputation of the committee may be traceable to the fact that it was extraordinarily active during its first few months of life. In 131 days it met 97 times and even met with the President eight times. It also sought aggressive action by McClellan (but so did Lincoln) and it attempted to influence efforts to break the blockade of the Potomoc. However, after April, 1862, its activity became less intense. It never again met with Stanton and never sought to tell the executive what military actions to take.

Westwood also noted that many of the committee's reports were in fact published after the war when they could have no effect on the war. Also, it was always inactive during recesses of Congress and overall functioned less than one-half of the time the war was in progress. And, most important, it supported the executive and the war effort. For example, in May, 1864, when the north was war weary and could have given up, it issued its report on Fort Pillow and the condition of Union prisoners of war; by showing the atrocities it hoped to encourage the north to fight on. In sum, Westwood said, while there was no love feast, bucking the executive during the war was definitely not on the committee's agenda.

The Third Annual Civil War Institute, "Campaigning with Lee," is scheduled for June 13-20, 1981. It will concentrate on campaigns in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. The principal campaigns of 1862 and 1864 as well as numerous related topics will be treated in classroom meetings and in two all-day bus tours extending from Cross Keys and Port Republic to Winchester. A number of side trips also will be available.

The program director is Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr., C.P. Miles Professor of History at Virginia Tech. Assisting him will be Robert K. Krick and Ed Raus of the National Park Service, plus a number of local historians. The Institute will be based on the campus of James Madison University in Harrisonburg. The cost is \$250 (or \$185 without lodging). For further information, write or call: Adult Registrar, Donaldson Brown Center for Continuing Education, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061 (703) 961-5182.

Henry C. Binford, Associate Professor of History at Northwestern University, will present the sixth Paul M. Angle Lecture at the Chicago Historical Society on February 18 at 5:30 p.m. He will speak on "The effect of the Civil War experience on the management of American cities."

THE NEW BOOKS



(Compiled by Dick Clark)

Bremner, Robert H. *The Public Good: Philanthropy and Welfare in the Civil War Era*. New York: Knopf, 1980. \$15.00. In the Impact of the Civil War series.

Cadwallader, Sylvanus. *Three Years with Grant*. Edited and with introduction and notes by Benjamin P. Thomas. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980. \$28.75. Reprint of the 1935 issue done by Knopf.

Cunliffe, Marcus. *Chattel Slavery and Wage Slavery: The Anglo-American Context 1830-1860*. Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1979. \$9.00. Mercer University, Lamar Memorial Lectures, no. 22.

Currie, James T. *Enclave: Vicksburg and her Plantations, 1863-1870*. Jackson; University Press of Mississippi, 1980. \$16.95.

Dickey, Thomas S. And Peter C. George. *Field Artillery Projectiles of the American Civil War*. Including a selection of Navy projectiles, hand grenades, rockets, and land mines. Edited by Col. Floyd W. McRae, Jr., ASAFR-Ret. Atlanta, Georgia: Arsenal Press, 1980. \$30.00.

Foner, Eric. *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980. \$15.95.

Johnson, Adam R. *The Partisan Rangers of the Confederate States Army*. Ed. by William J. Davis. Hartford, Ky.: Cook & McDowell Publishers, 1979. Reprint of the 1904 edition with new index.

Randall, James G. *Lincoln and the South*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980. \$18.75. Reprint of the 1946 printing done by Louisiana State University.

Sommers, Richard J. *Richmond Redeemed: The Seige at Petersburg*. New York: Doubleday, 1981. \$19.95.

Warren, Robert Penn. *Jefferson Davis Gets his Citizenship Back*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1980. \$8.75.

Weld, Stephen Minot. *War Diary and Letters, 1861-1865*. 2nd ed. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1979. Originally privately printed, 1912.

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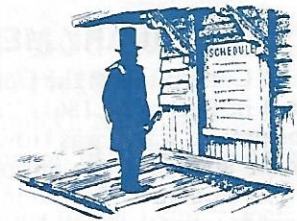
Grand George, New York, a sister, Eleanor (Mrs. Kenneth) Canfield, and four grandchildren.

Memorial services were held on Thursday, January 8, in Naples. The family asked that contributions in his memory be made to your favorite charity or educational institution. I think Ver Lynn would heartily agree that the CWRT is a highly proper institution for such a gift.

He was a delightful gentleman, always the life of the party, and regarded The Civil War Round Table and its members as one of the most important and fulfilling parts of his life. After moving to Florida, he continued to join us on our annual battlefield tours and on occasion came to Chicago for meetings. It is our great regret that he will not be with us on the occasion of our 400th meeting in April. He was the unanimous choice to be master-of-ceremonies on that occasion.

As Win Stracke was the balladeer of The Round Table, so Ver Lynn was the bard. For special occasions, solemn

BULLETIN BOARD



FUTURE MEETINGS

Regular meetings are held at the Como Inn, 546 N. Milwaukee Avenue, the second Friday in each month except as noted.

February 13: Gerhard P. Clausius on "The Drama of Mary Lincoln".

March 13: Marshall D. Krolick on "Stuart's Cavalry in the Gettysburg Campaign".

April 10: 400th Regular Meeting.

April 29-May 3: Annual Battlefield Tour to Vicksburg.

May 8: Archie P. McDonald on "Jed Hotchkiss, Jackson's Topographer".

June 5: Nevins-Freeman Award Dinner and installation of officers. Recipient of award: James I. Robertson, Jr.

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

NEW MEMBERS

Evelyn M. Bryant, 350 Linden St., Winnetka, Illinois 60093 (312) 446-0564. Mrs. Bryant has a special interest in Lincoln.

John Burns, 444 W. Roslyn Place, Apt. 3A, Chicago, Illinois 60614 (312) 935-3245. John works for the U.S. Postal Service and has a particular interest in political aspects of the war, Lincoln, and James Longstreet.

Thomas C. Gallanis, M.D., 1346 Somerset Drive, Glenview, Illinois 60025 (312) 998-5536. Dr. Gallanis is an obstetrician-gynecologist with offices in Evanston, Illinois.

Peter A. Hess, Hess & Kaplan, Ltd., 180 N. LaSalle St., Room 3420, Chicago, Illinois 60601 (312) 332-1100. Peter is interested in military aspects of the war.

Tom Peters, 4428 N. Natchez, Harwood Heights, Illinois 60656 (312) 867-9214. Tom, a sales engineer at Master Gauge, is interested in military aspects of the war.

and light, he always managed to compose verse that gladdened our hearts and lifted our spirits. It might be appropriate in concluding this brief tribute to him, to paraphrase from Henry Stevenson Washburn's poem in memory of a fallen comrade:

"We shall meet, but we shall miss him,
There will be one vacant chair;
It won't be the same without him,
Gone the poems and humor rare.
At our meetings, in his memory,
Often will the bosom swell
At remembrance of the story
That our friend Ver Lynn would tell."

WTTW will present Roy Dotrice in Herbert Mitgang's one-man drama, "Mister Lincoln", on February 9 at 9 p.m.