

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume XXXVII, Number 6

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February, 1977

FEBRUARY 11: MARK E. NEELY, JR. on "TO DISTINGUISH MYSELF"—LINCOLN AND THE MEXICAN WAR

Dr. Mark E. Neely, Jr., distinguished Lincoln historian and director of the Lincoln Library and Museum of the Lincoln National Life Foundation, will be our featured speaker on February 11th. His topic on that occasion will be "To Distinguish Myself: Lincoln and the Mexican War."

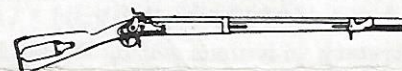
Dr. Neely's remarks will deal with that period of Abraham Lincoln's life during which he served in the House of Representatives as a Congressman from Illinois. Only eleven days after Lincoln was nominated to Congress, war with Mexico was declared. At first Lincoln supported the administration by advising all citizens to stand by the flag and to supply the needs of the brave men at the fighting front. However, he soon changed his position to that of many other members of the Whig party who felt that the war with Mexico was instigated by slaveholders desiring the extension of slave territory.



President Polk wanted possession of Texas, New Mexico, and California for the immense land and wealth each would bring to the United States. Thus his first goal was to acquire the huge area by any necessary means. Once that was accomplished he would face the issue of whether it would be slave or free.

Lincoln soon became outspoken in blaming the President and his administration for waging an unjust war against Mexico. As a result he was greatly criticized by many newspapers, some of whom even referred to him as a second Benedict Arnold. Many people back home, including his former law partner William Herndon, could not understand Lincoln's position, but Lincoln felt that instituting war against a neighboring people to force them to sell their land was dishonorable and disgraceful.

Dr. Neely will argue that Congressman Lincoln's opposition to the Mexican War was not, as Herndon later claimed, a matter of "political suicide." He states that there is almost no evidence at all that it harmed Lincoln's standing with the Whigs, and that he can prove that Herndon's memory was faulty. Moreover, by comparing Lincoln's career in the House of Representatives with those of other Midwestern Whigs, his actions appear neither unpopular nor unusual. Dr. Neely will also discuss the reason for Lincoln not running for re-election to the House of Representatives. He suggests that Lincoln simply did not like the job, being bored by the tedium which was the lot of any Midwestern



358th REGULAR MEETING

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MARK E. NEELY, JR.

on

"To Distinguish Myself" —
Lincoln and the Mexican War

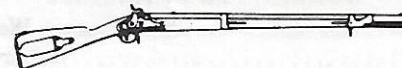
Friday, February 11, 1977

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Chicago Bar Association, 29 South LaSalle Street

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m.

Dinner at 6:30 p.m.



Congressman.

Mark E. Neely, Jr. received his undergraduate and graduate education at Yale University, earning a B.A. in 1966 and a Ph.D. in 1973. He taught American history at Iowa State University before coming to Fort Wayne, Indiana to head the Lincoln Library and Museum. In addition to the many speaking engagements he has each year, Dr. Neely edits "Lincoln Lore," which discusses the acquisitions of the Lincoln Library and Museum, reviews new books in the Lincoln field, and in general attempts to keep the reader abreast of the latest historical scholarship on America's middle period. His publications to date include "Abraham Lincoln's Nationalism Reconsidered," "American Nationalism in the Image of Henry Clay: Abraham Lincoln's Eulogy on Clay in Context," and "Richard W. Thompson: The Persistent Know Nothing."

The Lincoln National Life Foundation was established in 1928 to further historical research on the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. The Lincoln Library and Museum houses a collection of over 17,000 books and pamphlets on the mid-nineteenth century, including some 10,000 on Lincoln alone. It also contains an ever-growing collection of Lincoln manuscripts and letters written by Lincoln's contemporaries and associates. From these collections, the staff attempts to answer questions from researchers and the interested public on Abraham Lincoln's life. The Foundation also includes a large display of Lincoln relics, manuscripts, pictures and memorabilia. In addition to supplying photographs and copies of rare pamphlets and manuscripts, the Foundation publishes "Lincoln Lore."

January Meeting

The eighty members and guests who attended the January meeting expected to be thoroughly entertained and enlightened by one of the foremost Civil War historians of our time. Without question, they were not disappointed. However, our featured speaker was not the anticipated James I. "Bud" Robertson, Jr., Dr. Robertson's scheduled appearance fell victim to the severe winter weather, as a major ice storm prevented his departure from Virginia.

Answering President Carr's Friday morning call for a substitute was Founder and Nevins-Freeman Award recipient Ralph G. Newman. In characteristic fashion, Ralph provided those present with an evening of stimulating and provocative scholarship highlighted not only by his prepared remarks, but also by a fascinating question and answer period. The latter session found everyone remaining in their seats until only the lateness of the hour forced adjournment.

For his topic Ralph chose, "A Critical Appraisal of Robert E. Lee" and he began by stating that it was high time we examined the career of the great Confederate leader from a position other than on our knees. Organizing his thoughts by way of a reply to the pictures of Lee painted by Freeman, Roland, and others, Ralph termed these assessments as just short of deification. A prime target of his criticism was the Southern writers' attempts to alibi or justify Lee's over-protectiveness of Virginia. A correct evaluation shows that every one of "Marse Robert's" attempts at grand strategy was an effort to relieve the pressure on his native state. He consistently refused to permit the detachment of troops from his own army to strengthen beleaguered Southern forces in other areas of the Confederacy. With his eyes firmly fixed on the Old Dominion, he even failed to recognize the serious blow his cause had suffered by the fall of Vicksburg, passing off its loss in a single sentence in a letter to Davis otherwise filled with concern for Virginia.

While not ignoring Lee's many great achievements and virtues, Ralph cited many flaws and errors of judgement as evidence that he was not the omnipotent successor to Hannibal that legend has made him. The entire Gettysburg campaign can only be described as a tremendous blunder from start to finish. In recommending the invasion of Pennsylvania, Lee grossly misjudged its effect on the Federal populace and overestimated the strength of the Northern peace party. His tactics during the three day battle can most charitably be described as terrible. On that battlefield, and others, he fought where prudence and sound military thinking dictated otherwise. Faulty, too, were his opinions on the capabilities of his subordinates, as he failed to appreciate their limitations. Long after he had lost Jackson, he continued to plan offensive strikes without realizing he had no one able to lead them.

Citing Livermore's figures, Ralph pointed out that Lee's troops suffered greater casualties percentage-wise than did Grant's and this despite the fact that Lee was more often on the defensive where losses were traditionally lighter. Yet Grant is referred to as a butcher. Turning next to his relationship with his commander-in-chief, Ralph noted that even Lee's staunchest admirers find fault with his excessive deference to Jefferson Davis. This gave the Confederate president, a frustrated general, an even greater opportunity to meddle in military affairs than his position would have otherwise afforded him. In concluding his remarks, Ralph called for an objective biography of Lee by a Northerner, as well as one of Lincoln by a Southerner. Only in this way can we perhaps pierce the veil of heroism and idolatry which has surrounded these two leaders and clouded the true picture of each man.

Please take note that, because of Good Friday, the April meeting has been changed to the third Friday, rather than the second, and will therefor be held on April 15, 1977.

TO THE CAMPFOLLOWERS (LADIES)

The weather did us in! There were so many cancellations because of illness, bad driving conditions, and unwilling baby sitters, that our last meeting was cancelled. Merlin Sumner very graciously consented to postpone his appearance and will be with us on February 11, when he will speak to us on "Incidents Curiously Related: A Biographical Sketch of Ulysses S. Grant." The talk is certain to be a most interesting one and you are all urged to attend and to bring an interested friend. The cocktail hour will begin at 5:30 p.m., in the second floor private dining room of Stouffer's Restaurant, at Randolph and Wabash. The talk will follow at 6:00 promptly, so that it will be possible for the speaker to attend the men's meeting. Add your reservation to your husband's card or telephone Margaret April, 787-1860.

1977 NEVINS-FREEMAN AWARD

The selection committee, chaired by Jerry Edelstein and Merlin Sumner, has announced that the 1977 Nevins-Freeman Award will be presented to Honorary Life Member Lloyd Miller. Lloyd, whose career has been characterized by devotion to scholarship and philanthropy, will join Bruce Catton, Ralph G. Newman, and T. Harry Williams as a most worthy recipient of our highest honor. A member of The Round Table since April 23, 1941, Lloyd has been the prime benefactor of our Fellowship program and has shared with us on many occasions his own historical expertise as a speaker on such subjects as the Battle of Franklin and the Second Day at Gettysburg. The presentation ceremonies will be held in the remodeled facilities of the Chicago Public Library's Cultural Center on June 10, 1977. Additional details of the program for this fine evening will be announced as they become available.

William (Will) Leonard 1912-1977

Once again, as has unfortunately occurred several times in recent months, The Round Table has suffered a deep loss. William (Will) Leonard, humorist, drama and entertainment critic, historian, and brilliant columnist for the Chicago Tribune passed away on January 6, 1977 at the age of 64. A regular attendant on our annual battlefield tours, his wit and companionship added immeasurably to the pleasure of all. Just this past year his magnificent defense of the railroad bridge at Monocacy in the face of the charge of a fast-moving freight train earned for Will the 1976 Confederate Purple Heart Award.

However, the twinkle of his eye and the ever present smile of a leprechaun masked, but never hid, Will's serious appreciation of those who preceded us and what they accomplished. His interests covered a wide range of subjects and each found its way into his newspaper columns. Preservation of fading memories, such as straw hats and the St. Louis Browns, the majesty of railroading, the romanticism of Sherlock Holmes, and even the adventures of the battlefield tour; all were chronicled for the readers of Chicago. To his family we can only extend our most sincere sympathy, for their loss is also our loss. Of such as Will Leonard is the Round Table made, and he will have a place in our hearts for so long as we join together in the fellowship and scholarship he symbolized.

We have learned that several of Will's friends are interested in establishing a living memorial to him at the Chicago Historical Society. This tribute could take the form of a lecture or publication series. We shall so advise you should these plans become a reality.

THE NEW BOOKS



(Compiled by Dick Clark)

Anderson, Edward C. *Confederate Foreign Agent; The European Diary of Major Edward C. Anderson*. Edited with a prologue by W. Stanley Hoole. Gettysburg, Pa.: Historical Times Book Service. \$12.50

Borcke, Heros von and Justus Scheibert. *The Great Cavalry Battle of Brandy Station*. Translated from the German with historical commentary by Stuart T. Wright and F.D. Bridgewater. Foreword by Bell I. Wiley. Winston-Salem, N.C.: Palaemon Press Ltd. \$10.00

Boyd, Cyrus F. *The Civil War Diary of Cyrus F. Boyd, Fifteenth Iowa Infantry 1861-1863*. New introduction by E.B. Long. Willwood, N.Y.; Kraus Reprint, 1977. \$12.50

Harwell, Richard B., editor. *The Confederate Reader*. New York: McKay, 1976. \$9.95; paper \$4.95. Original of 1957.

Hobbs, Thomas Hubbard. *The Journals of...* Edited with notes and index by Faye Acton Axford. Gettysburg: Historical Times Book Service, 1976. \$10.00

Katcher, Philip R.N. *Army of the Potomac*. Colour plates by Michael Youens. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1975. \$4.95

Katcher, Philip R.N. *The Army of Northern Virginia*. Colour plates by Michael Youens. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1975. \$4.95

Persico, Joseph E. *My Enemy, My Brother: Men and Days of Gettysburg*. New York: Grossman Publishers, 1977. \$12.50

Peter, Frances Dallam. *Window on the War. Lexington Civil War Diary of...* Lexington, Ky.: Lexington-Fayette County Historic Commission, 1976. paper \$4.50

Raphael, Morri. *The Battle in the Bayou Country*. Detroit: Harlo Press, 1976. \$10.95. On the war in South Louisiana.

Thurow, Glen E. *Abraham Lincoln and American Political Religion*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976. \$10.00

Williams, T. Harry. *McClellan, Sherman, and Grant*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976. \$10.75. Reprint of the edition done by Rutgers University Press in 1962.

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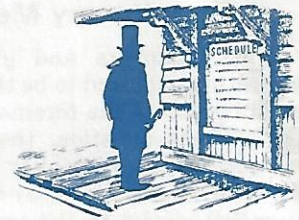
Tower and palaces of avarice like it where we wish our children to learn of our history, our heritage? Should our courts and laws sanction such places as institutions of learning? Mr. Ottenstein has already won his war against battlefield preservation. Let us hope he does not win this one against the concepts of our educational system.

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Several of our members are active on the speaking trail. Lowell Reidenbaugh addressed the Louisville CWRT in November on "Jackson's Valley Campaign" and will present the same program to the Milwaukee CWRT on February 17. The Kansas City and St. Louis CWRTs have invited Past Presidents Brooks Davis and Marshall Krolick to be their featured speakers in successive months. Brooks described the Battle of Perryville for each in January and Marshall will review Brandy Station in February.

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Civil War historian and Nevins-Freeman Award recipient Bruce Catton was among twenty-one Americans awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Ford in ceremonies at the White House on January 10, 1977. The Medal, our Nation's highest civilian award, is conferred for meritorious contribution to the areas of security or national interest of the United States, world peace or cultural or other significant public or private endeavors.



BULLETIN BOARD

FUTURE MEETINGS

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

February 11: Mark E. Neely, Jr. on "To Distinguish Myself: Lincoln and the Mexican War."

March 11: Dr. William E. Parrish on "The Bohemian Brigade: The Eastern Press Covers the War in Missouri in 1861."

April 15: Elden E. (Josh) Billings on "Sherman: A Critical Character Sketch."

May 4-8: Annual Battlefield Tour to Middle Tennessee.

May 13: Dr. Richard J. Sommers on "Petersburg."

June 10: Ladies night, Nevins-Freeman Award Dinner and Installation of Officers. Recipient of Award — Lloyd Miller.

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

NEW MEMBERS

Anthony Primack, 1505 S. 57th Ct., Cicero, Illinois 60650.

Timothy J. Gay, 5220 S. Kenwood, Apt. 301, Chicago, Illinois 60615.

Arnold C. Bodinet, Jr., 7137 S. Christiana, Chicago, Illinois 60629.

Thomas J. Price, 20449 Ithaca Road, Olympia Fields, Illinois 60461.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS

Harry G. Hershenson, 3750 Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60613.

Hamilton Pitt, 55 W. Chestnut, Apt. 2907, Chicago, Illinois 60610.

John F. Wilhelm II, 8750 Harrison, Munster, Indiana 46321.

Joseph A. Kopec, 108 N. State Street, Chicago, Illinois 60602.

Under the guidance of Chairman Dan Weinberg, our Speakers Bureau has been reactivated. Any social, civic, school, or fraternal organization or other Round Table desiring a speaker on the Civil War, Lincoln, or related fields need only contact Dan at the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop. Dan would also like to hear from members of The Round Table who would be interested in being listed on the Bureau's roster of those willing and able to present such programs.

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Electors of the Hall of Fame in New York, which is affiliated with New York University and the City University of New York, have announced that among those recently selected for induction into this gallery of great Americans is Clara Barton, famed Civil War Nurse. However, one of those who did not receive enough votes to have his bust so enshrined was Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy.