

# THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume XLIII, Number 6

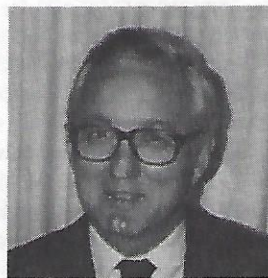
Chicago, Illinois

February, 1983

## C. Robert Douglas on General George H. Thomas: Time and History Will Do Me Justice

The military career of Union general George H. Thomas, from the Mexican War until his death while in command of the Military Division of the Pacific at San Francisco, will be fellow member and past president C. Robert Douglas' topic when he addresses The Round Table meeting February 18. Bob feels that Thomas, and his considerable military ability, has been generally neglected by Civil War scholars; he cites as evidence the fact that in its 42 years of existence The Round Table has not had a talk on this fine soldier. His talk will rectify this omission and do justice to the record of an impressive American general.

George H. Thomas was born in Virginia and graduated from West Point in 1840. When the Civil War broke out he stayed with the Union (for which his family never forgave him). He fought with Buell in Kentucky and under Rosecrans at Stones River. At Chickamauga, he held



C. Robert Douglas

the vital Snodgrass Hill, earning the title "Rock of Chickamauga." He moved with Sherman to Atlanta, but when Sherman decided to go to the sea Thomas was sent back to defend Nashville against Hood. He routed and almost completely destroyed Hood's army at the Battle of Nashville. After the war he served in various posts.

In the April, 1966, issue of *Civil War Times Illustrated*, Glenn Tucker, author of *Chickamauga: Bloody Battle in the West*, presented a profile of General Thomas. In that article he expressed the opinion that... "if there were emergences of significance during and before the centennial years, it seems to this writer that one resulted from a closer focusing of the analytical lenses on Major General George H. Thomas."

Although Bob feels the centennial years did produce the best biography of Thomas that has appeared, Francis F. McKinney's *Education in Violence: The Life of George H. Thomas and the History of the Army of the Cumberland*, and although he admires the writings of Tucker, he takes issue with Tucker's belief that there has been an improvement in the stature of Thomas relative to his peers in either blue or grey. Bob also notes that Thomas has been labeled a defensive commander, but in his talk he will emphasize his offensive capabilities in his leadership in



418th Regular Meeting

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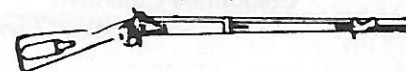
C. Robert Douglas  
on  
General George H. Thomas:  
Time and History Will  
Do Me Justice

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Friday, February 18, 1983

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Illinois Athletic Club  
112 S. Michigan  
Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.  
\$12.50 per person



### Meeting date

Please note that the February meeting will be held on the third Friday of the month, **February 18**, instead of the 11th. President Marv Sanderman has designated the February meeting guest night and encourages you to bring your spouse or a friend. We will be meeting in the Grand Ballroom.

Starting with the February meeting, we will test a new procedure at the front door for late arriving members. Once the treasurer has left the door to begin eating, late arrivals should sign in and find (or write up) their name tags. After the meeting the treasurer will return to the front door and collect the dinner fee.

the Battle of Nashville. He will conclude his talk with reasons why time and history haven't done justice to the record of this fine American soldier.

C. Robert Douglas has been a member of The Round Table for 32 years, and served as president when it celebrated its 20th anniversary. Born in Maywood,

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# THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



**Founded December 3, 1940**

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

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Honorary Awards ..... Brooks Davis  
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Picnic ..... Theodore Eberly  
Golf Outing ..... Terry Carr

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 60007.



## Civil War Conference

The Executive Committee, at its meeting January 14, approved plans for the first annual Civil War Conference to be held June 11, 1983, in conjunction with the Nevins-Freeman Award program. The conference will be an all day Saturday affair; the Nevins-Freeman Award, and address by Dr. John Hope Franklin, will be presented at a luncheon.

The major theme of the conference, which will be held at the Chicago Historical Society, is "Civil Rights and the Civil War." The morning session will consist of probably two talks, with time for questions. Following lunch and presentation of the Award at a restaurant near the Historical Society, there will be an afternoon panel discussion on "Civil Rights and the Civil War."

Other Round Tables are invited to participate in the conference by submitting the names of possible speakers from their organization. Selection will be by the Civil War Conference committee.

Because of the scheduling problems often experienced in planning the June Nevins-Freeman Award dinner, the combined Conference and Nevins-Freeman Award day will probably be held in September, beginning in 1984.

In other action, the executive committee tentatively selected July 31 as the date of the third annual picnic and August 13 as the date of a golf outing. The committee also voted to delay sale of tapes of previous talks to The Round Table until consent of the speakers can be obtained.

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Ralph Newman, who is celebrating 50 years in the book-selling business this month, and the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop, were the subject of a feature article in the February issue of *Americana* magazine. Complete with full color photos, the article details Ralph's career as a bookseller, author and dealer in Lincolniana. It notes that despite the substantial increase in the price of letters and documents which has taken place, Ralph disdains the idea of collecting for profit. "I don't encourage investment collectors," he said. "If you want to invest, you can buy stocks, bonds, or real estate. When you buy historical documents, you are investing in happiness and culture."

The same issue contains an article on the restoration of the farmhouse in western Maryland from which John Brown launched his famous raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859. The man responsible for rescuing the house from possible demolition by developers, South Trimble Lynn, is a relative of Confederate soldiers. He is quoted as saying, "My leanings are southern; but when it comes to history, I feel that people should preserve it just the way it happened."

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A memorial service marking the 150th anniversary of the birth of Confederate Major General J.E.B. Stuart will be held in Richmond on February 6. The speaker for the occasion will be Admiral Beverly Mosby Coleman, grandson of Colonel James Singleton Mosby. Among the guests will be three generations of the Stuart family.

A display of material pertaining to Stuart is now on exhibit in the mural room at the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond.



## January meeting

Despite an uncertain start (the speaker's plane did not land at O'Hare until after 6 p.m., and the backup speaker, Merl Sumner, was waiting for him at the airport), the January meeting proved to be a most interesting and informative one for the 115 members and guests who attended. They heard Dennis Frye, park historian at Harpers Ferry, vividly describe the siege and capture of that town in September, 1862. They also heard him clear up some of the mysteries surrounding that event, such as who was responsible for the failure to hold Maryland Heights and how did the 12th Illinois Cavalry manage to escape the Confederates' trap?

The story of the siege and capture really began on September 4 when Lee launched his invasion of the north. He expected the Federal forces in the lower Shenandoah to retreat northward, but they didn't—the garrison at Harpers Ferry was thus in position to cut off his supplies. In addition, he was outnumbered by McClellan and the advancing Army of the Potomac. On September 9, Lee issued Special Order 191 at Frederick, Maryland: columns under Jackson, McLaws and Walker were to surround and capture Harpers Ferry.

As Dennis noted, Harpers Ferry sits in a bowl surrounded by Maryland, Bolivar and Loudoun Heights. The Union commander, Dixon S. Miles, had only 3,000 of his 14,000 men on Maryland Heights, the highest position and thus the key to holding Harpers Ferry. On Bolivar Heights he had 7,000 men, and on Loudoun Heights he had nobody. The rest of the garrison was at Camp Hill. Importantly, as Dennis noted, only one of the 10 infantry regiments at Harpers Ferry had been in existence since the time of First Manassas. Thus, Harpers Ferry was, in Miles' words, "a fortified camp of instruction." These untrained officers and men were to face the flower of Lee's army.

On September 13 Miles supposedly sent an order to Colonel Thomas Ford, who commanded the 3,000 men on Maryland Heights, which said that the Heights were defensible and should be held "until the cows' tails drop off." Two hours later, however, Ford and his men came down and the Heights were taken by McLaws. Within hours the Union garrison was surrounded. (Walker held Loudoun Heights and Jackson Bolivar Heights). A "text-book" artillery barrage of the Federals began on the 14th, and continued on the 15th. The Federal commanders unanimously decided to surrender; Miles was mortally wounded following the raising of the white flag. The Confederates took 12,000 prisoners and 73 pieces of artillery.

The military, the government and the press immediately began asking questions. Why was Maryland Heights not held? Where was McClellan? Was Miles drunk or a traitor? On September 25 a military commission to investigate the surrender of Harpers Ferry, under General David Hunter, was convened. On trial were the brigade commanders and General Julius White who was at Harpers Ferry but not in command. During 15 days of testimony the commission heard 44 military and civilian witnesses.

Turning first to the testimony surrounding the evacuation of Maryland Heights, Dennis detailed the conflicting accounts that were presented. Lt. Henry Binney, Miles' aide, maintained that Ford was told to hold the Heights at all costs, and referenced the Cows' Tails

order. Ford, however, said that Miles left it up to his discretion to evacuate if necessary; his account was corroborated by a civilian witness who said she overheard the conversation. Further, Ford said he never received the Cows' Tails order.

Dennis himself went to the National Archives and read Miles' order book. He said it does indeed contain the Cows' Tails order of the 13th. However, it is the last entry in the book following entries of the 14th. No where else are orders out of order. All orders were written in the book by Lt. Binney, and in Dennis' opinion there is no question but that Binney wrote the order after the surrender to protect Miles' name.

Turning next to the question, was escape from Harpers Ferry possible, Dennis noted that the 12th Illinois Cavalry, 1400 strong, did escape on the night of September 14, crossing the Potomac and traveling right along the base of Maryland Heights. Why didn't the Confederates stop them? The answer is that the few Confederates there were more than a mile away and not within sight.

As Dennis noted, on the day after the evacuation of the Heights, September 14, two companies of Union soldiers were sent back up to retrieve ammunition and four guns—they met little resistance. The reason there were so few enemy was that the Confederate forces were engaged in the Battle of South Mountain (where Union Forces under General William Franklin threatened to cut off McLaws). The Union garrison could have gone back up on the Heights and held on for days.

As a possible explanation for the way Miles deployed at Harpers Ferry, Dennis noted that he was with General Rufus Saxton when Saxton faced Jackson there in May, 1862. Saxton had deployed just as Miles did, and Jackson had turned around (of course, he was being threatened from the rear). Perhaps Miles was simply doing something he had seen work before. But in any case, Dennis concluded, he was not drunk, nor was he a traitor.

The commission ultimately censured McClellan for not relieving the garrison and he was relieved of command of the Army of the Potomac the day the report came out (November 7, 1862). General White, Dennis said, managed to convince the commission he was in no way responsible for the surrender of Harpers Ferry. Both Ford and Binney were booted out of the Army.

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*(continued from page 1)*

Illinois, he served in the Army Air Force in North Africa, Corsica and Italy during World War II. A graduate of Beloit College, he has worked in a variety of positions in the insurance field for 28 years, and currently is the casualty manager for a Loop insurance agency. He also serves on the board of governors of the Illinois St. Andrew Society, a charitable organization which supports a home for elderly Scots in North Riverside, Illinois. His duties presently include serving as chairman of the Society's admissions committee.

Although his four children live in the Southwest, Bob now resides in an apartment above the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop, the mecca for those with a deep and abiding interest in the people and events of the War between the States. As Bob says, "it's difficult to be closer to the Civil War than that!"



## THE NEW BOOKS



(compiled by Dick Clark)

Cotton, Gordon A. *The Old Court House* [Vicksburg]. Vicksburg: Old Court House Museum, 1982. \$9.95 plus postage.

Hattaway, Herman and Archer Jones. *How the North Won. A Military History of the Civil War*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983. 762 p. \$24.95.

Lincoln, Abraham. *Selected Writings and Speeches of Abraham Lincoln*. Edited by T. Harry Williams. New York: Hendricks House, 1981. Pbk \$3.95. Originally published 1943.

Mitgang, Herbert. *Mister Lincoln: A Drama in Two Acts*. Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1982. \$7.50.

Widener, Ralph W., Jr. *Confederate Monuments: Enduring Symbols of the South and the War Between the States*. The Author: Dallas, Texas. 307 p. \$15.00.

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The Round Table has received a generous bequest of \$500 from the estate of Frances Dillon Ames, who was a frequent companion on our battlefield tours. We offer our sincere thanks to her executor, Bernard Lord.

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Among the guests welcomed to the January meeting were Mrs. Olive S. Foster, Executive Director of the Illinois State Historical Library, and Mrs. Wilma Lund, President of the Illinois State Historical Society. They journeyed from Springfield to be with us.

The Illinois State Historical Society was founded in 1899 as a not-for-profit corporation designed to help the Illinois State Historical Library collect and preserve the raw materials of history—books, manuscripts, photos, etc. Membership in the Society, which includes a subscription to the quarterly journal and the newsletter, is only \$12.50 per year. For further information, write Illinois State Historical Society, Old State Capitol, Springfield, Illinois 62706.

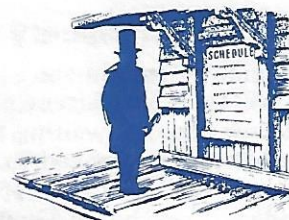
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Samuel J. T. Moore, Jr. received the Richmond Civil War Round Table's 1982 Ambler Johnston Award for distinguished service for the preservation of Civil War history. He is the author of "Moore's Complete Civil War Guide to Richmond." (Participants in our Battlefield Tour to the Shenandoah Valley in 1980 will remember that Mr. Moore appeared before us on fun night in the person of Confederate President Jefferson Davis). Previous recipients of the Johnston Award are Bill Mallory and Roland Galvin.

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Nominating committee chairman Bob Franke has announced that a committee meeting will be held at 2 p.m. on March 12 at his home, 100 W. Thackery Place, Mt. Prospect. All past presidents are encouraged to attend. Call Bob at 392-6721 for further information and directions.

## BULLETIN BOARD



### Future meetings

Regular meetings are held at the Illinois Athletic Club, 112 S. Michigan, the second Friday in each month except as noted.

February 18: C. Robert Douglas on "General George H. Thomas: Time and History Will Do Me Justice." **Note: this is the third Friday of the month.**

March 11: John Divine on "Cavalry Campaigns: A Prelude to Gettysburg."

April 8: Robert W. Johannsen on "Senator Stephen A. Douglas and the Spirit of the Age."

April 27-May 1: Annual Battlefield Tour to Chattanooga-Chickamauga.

May 13: Kathy Georg on "Actions at the Rose Farm on the Second Day at Gettysburg."

June 11: Civil War Conference. Nevins-Freeman Award Luncheon and Installation of Officers. Recipient of award: Dr. John Hope Franklin.

Every Monday: Informal luncheon meetings at Wieboldt's Men's Grill, 9th Floor, 12:15 p.m. All members are welcome.

### New members

Kurt A. Carlson, 1636 Wadham Place, Wheaton, Illinois 60187 (312) 462-0056.

Terry Haines, 2020 Algonquin Road, Suite 301, Schaumburg, Illinois (312) 397-9171.

Ronald Holcer, 4339 N. Mason, Chicago, Illinois 60634.

Kevin M. Kavanagh, 119 Bernice, Bensenville, Illinois 60106.

Robert M. Markunas, 6105 W. 64th Place, Chicago, Illinois 60628.

Harlan Noel, 8238 Calumet, Munster, Indiana 46321 (219) 836-5514.

### Peggy P. (Mrs. Foreman M.) Lebold (1897-1982)

by Ralph G. Newman

Peggy Lebold, an old friend and member of The Civil War Round Table, died in her apartment in Chicago on Christmas Day, 1982. Peggy was the widow of Foreman M. ("Mike") Lebold, one of the early members of The Civil War Round Table, and one of the great collectors of Lincoln and Civil War material in the country.

Peggy was one of the first ladies (along with Margaret April) to participate in CWRT battlefield tours. When membership opened to women, she was one of the first to join. Possessor of a fine sense of humor and a gift for friendship, she was beloved by all who knew her in our organization. She was active until failing health a few years ago made it impossible for her to participate in our activities. She continued, however, to be generous in supporting our activities. She donated her fine collection of miniature books to The Chicago Public Library a few years ago.