Robert H. Fowler on New Discoveries about the Civil War

Robert H. Fowler, general manager of “Civil War Times Illustrated,” will be speaker at the June 9, 1972, meeting of the Civil War Round Table at the Chicago Bar Association on “New Discoveries about the Civil War” as he has observed them since he founded the magazine in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1959. Since then it has grown to a circulation of 32,000, besides expanding into the National Historical Society, publishing “American History Illustrated” with a membership of 70,000, and recently a third magazine, “Early American Life,” has been added, with a circulation of 28,000.

In outlining the subject matter of his talk, Mr. Fowler writes:

“The Civil War was settled in 1865 at Appomattox, and with the publication of various Generals’ memoirs and the OFFICIAL RECORDS all the information that means anything was in print . . . or was it?

“I thought so when I started CIVIL WAR TIMES in 1959 as a part-time project, but every year of publication further convinced me that my original assumption was wrong. New discoveries are constantly popping out about the Civil War.

“For instance, Lee’s early feeling that Negroes should be used as Confederate soldiers, a first-person account by Billy Mahone about the retreat to Appomattox; a Union Colonel’s description of the Battle of Fredericksburg as seen from a balloon; some unpublished photographs of Grant and his family; even the true story of General Schimmelfennig’s hiding place in Gettysburg while the battle raged . . . these are just a few of the items CIVIL WAR TIMES Illustrated has published in recent years, not to mention the full story of the massacre of Negro soldiers at Salixville, Va. in October 1864 and the truth about what happened to several hundred thousand dollars in Confederate funds in Canada.

“I also will talk about a few goodies we are checking on now for future publication.”

Robert Howard Fowler was born July 2, 1926, in Monroe, North Carolina, where his father, James, was a livestock dealer and father of ten children by two marriages. In 1934 the family moved to Charlotte, where Bob grew up. He served in the U.S. Naval Reserve, 1945-46, entered Guilford College in 1947, and received an A. B. at the University of North Carolina in 1950, and an M.A. in journalism at Columbia University in 1954.

He was reporter for the Greensboro Daily News before leaving North Carolina for Florida in 1955 to become city editor of the St. Petersburg Times. In 1956 he became editorial writer for the Harrisburg Patriot-
from the Editor's pen

The 150th birthday of Ulysses S. Grant, April 27, 1972, was celebrated April 21 at the Chicago Public Library by The Civil War Round Table in conjunction with the Ulysses S. Grant Association, the Illinois Special Events Commission, the Friends of the Library, guests and wives, with due and ancient ceremony, including a look at the famed collections of the G.A.R. Room. The collation, to borrow a term from Grant’s day, was pronounced excellent. Jazz Limited, admitting it had never before played “Lorena,” did it very well, along with “Battle Hymn of the Republic” and other period pieces.

T. Harry Williams, at work on “Grant as President,” did not limit his talk to that aspect, but did emphasize that a re-evaluation of Grant as President might be in order. Grant’s life was marked by failures before the war, and in business after the Presidency. While his personal integrity is not assailed, his administration was marked by scandals. Bruce Catton sees him as great only as soldier, a view in which Gen. J. F. C. Fuller concurred. Senator Wayne Morse once stated that in comparison with another soldier-president, Eisenhower, Grant was made to look like a statesman. Both were inarticulate. Henry Adams saw Grant as dull, unimaginative, and unlearned. Yet Grant’s “Memoirs” is regarded as one of the great works of Civil War and military history, praised by such varied critics as Matthew Arnold, William Dean Howells, and Gertrude Stein.

Taylor, Grant, and Eisenhower, the three professional soldiers who became President, all looked upon that office as above politics. Both Grant and Eisenhower saw it as an administrative office to execute the will of the people, that will being expressed by Congress. Both, recognizing the fear of the “man on horseback” used too little power. Grant expressed it as “having no policy of my own; my duty to enforce the will of the people.” Grant was not devoid of originality; during the panic of 1873 he proposed a program of employment on public works, an idea not accepted until 60 years later. Nor was he devoid of humor. When it was remarked that Senator Charles Sumner “did not believe the Bible” Grant snapped “Of course not. He did not write it.”

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While attendance at the Grant party was strictly limited, and late-comers were denied a reservation, invasion by a gate crasher, was narrowly averted by the quick action of Ward and Edie Smidl. Appropriately named Sara Grant Smidl, all 6 pounds, 4 ounces of her, agreed to make her appearance at a nearby hospital at 11 p.m. the night of the party.

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WELLS ON DOUGLAS

Damon Wells, Jr., speaking on Stephen A. Douglas May 12, gave a talk that will be long remembered, according to all reports that reached your editor who was unfortunately temporarily incapacitated that evening and thus unable to give the customary account. “A very personable and obviously very bright young man,” was the verdict on Wells by one of our veteran members, who continues, “I marvel, wondering whether it’s history or investment business that is his avocation. Our inability to give a summary of the talk is less regretted because of the publication of Wells’s book, “Stephen A. Douglas: The Last Years, 1857-1861” where you can get it all and much more accurately than might appear in these columns.
9:00-10:00 A.M.—Pickie Barrel Restaurant, Howard and Western. (Park your car and lock it...free parking.)

Civil War Lox and Bagel Breakfast...Lox-Smoked Fish-Cream Cheese-Tomatoes-Onions-Olives-Bagels-Hard Rolls-Sweet Rolls and 2 Eggs any style-Coffee, Tea or Milk. All you can eat. Then air conditioned buses leave.


10:30 A.M.—Leave for Rosehill Cemetery, Rosehill Drive and Ravenswood to Rosehill Cemetery where we disembark to visit the Leonard Wells Volk monument, the Long John Wentworth Memorial, the Ezra Taylor battery, General Thomas E. G. Ransom grave, the George Thomas G.A.R. Memorial marker for the Chicago veterans of the Chickamauga campaign.

11:00 A.M.—Leave for Graceland Cemetery, on the way we will pass the Germans’ statue to their Civil War dead at St. Boniface Cemetery. At 11:30 we arrive at Graceland Cemetery, Irving Park and Clark Street. Here we will visit the Allan Pinkerton grave, the Timmy Webster marker, and Katy Warren grave. Webster was executed by the confederacy—master Federal spy and Pinkerton operative.

Katy Warren was the first lady detective. Pinkerton protected Lincoln on his way to Washington, D.C. and was also the first Chicago Plain Clothes Detective.

12:30 P.M.—Arrive at the new addition to the Chicago Historical Society which contains the Lincoln Furniture, the Painters and Sculptors exhibit of Illinois from 1820-1945, and a special Chicago Fire show.

2:00 P.M.—South to Grant Park viewing two more important Lincoln statues.

3:00 P.M.—Arrive at the Stephen A. Douglas tomb and Memorial 35th Street and Illinois Central tracks.

TO THE CAMP FOLLOWERS (LADIES)

Meeting: Friday, June 9, 1972 at 5:30 p.m.
Place: Stouffer’s Restaurant, 32 East Randolph, private dining room.
Program: A real party to end another rewarding year as the Civil War Round Table’s only unauthorized personnel, and to welcome long time, faithful member, Betty Walter (Mrs. Robert) as the new president. It will be a gala, fun evening—and there may be some surprises!

Reservations: Must be made by Wednesday, June 7, by calling Joyce Warshaw at 866-6667, or writing her (Mrs. Jerry) at 1319 Crain St, Evanston, 60202.

The last meeting, May 12, was a fabulous first for the Camp Followers. Alice Cromie, author of “A Tour Guide to the Civil War”, and Chicago Tribune columnist (Books Today) read chapters from her yet unpublished new novel “To See the Elephant”. The ladies felt duly honored by Alice’s generosity, and hearing her own “asides” over some of the saucer bits will long be cherished.

While it isn’t fair to tell more about “To See the Elephant”, we can say that it is written in first person by “Si”, supposedly one of the most honest and faithful of Civil War correspondents. The dialogue is wickedly witty, and to follow Si through his reporting of varied and amazing experiences is so fast moving it must be classified as downright racy.

“To See the Elephant” will be a sell out; best get in line for your copy! Congratulations to Camp Follower Cromie!
THE NEW BOOKS

(Compiled by Dick Clark)


Confederate Veteran Magazine. Index. Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1972. $25.00. This is a facsimile reprint of the forty indexes as issued between 1893 and 1932.

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THE BATTLEFIELD PARKS

Our good friend and fellow member J. Ambler Johnston writes from Richmond:

"As a member of your Round Table, I write this letter to ask if you think the members of the Civil War Round Table would be interested in a situation which seems to be developing in the Congress against the approval of purchase by the National Park Service of critical sections of land adjacent to present Civil War parks.

"My having been closely identified with a group of Richmond citizens who purchased on our own and at considerable expense the very important lands on which six great battles were fought, 1861-65, and then donated them to the State of Virginia and later to the U.S. Government, causes me to be greatly interested in other lands being saved for posterity.

"In recent months the National Park Service has obtained options on critical parcels of land adjacent to Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park. Before this land can be purchased, however, the transactions must be approved by the appropriate committees in Congress. The committees in the House have approved them, but the Senate Subcommittee on Appropriations and Subcommittee on Interior and Insular Affairs have not. The committees apparently have adopted a policy that no more Civil War land can be acquired unless the land contiguous to it is zoned against commercial development. In the meantime, of course, the land will probably be lost to various developments. Senator Alan Bible (D.-Nevada) is chairman of both subcommittees.

"My question is to ask if you think your members would be interested in approaching your own Senators and Representatives expressing your interest in assisting the Park Service to obtain these lands."

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BATTLEFIELD TOUR

Will Leonard, Chicago Tribune columnist, reported on the battlefield tour in his column in The Tribune of May 13 as follows:

LIKE IT or not, here's our annual report on the Maytime tour of the members of the Civil War Round Table of Chicago to battlefields of a century and more ago down there in Dixie [where the spring is more beautifully advanced than it is up here among us Yankees].

This year the devotees went down to Mississippi, to inspect the terrain covered by General Grant in his campaign to capture Vicksburg in 1863. We didn't learn much we hadn't known before, about the Vicksburg campaign, but we did learn what you do about a guy who asks you if you're a Civil War "buff."

[What a terrible word.] Said Mort Feigen: "Anybody who calls us 'buffs' should get a pie in the face. We call ourselves 'lay historians.'"

A retired colonel, speaking at one of the dinner parties that follows the day's tramping over the battlefields, recalled that once, when applying for a federal job, he was asked: "Do you have any close relatives who advocated the overthrow of the United States government?" He replied: "I had a great-uncle who was a corporal in the Confederate army."

Dan Lapinski recalled the time he went down to Corinth, Miss., a couple of years ago, to do some advance groundwork for a tour of the Civil War Round Table. When he asked a motel owner about booking nearly 100 reservations for some Civil War fans from Chicago, the man angrily ran him out of the place. An hour later Dan was having lunch in a Corinth beannery when the motel owner walked in, still burning, and Dan heard him tell the restaurant owner: "One of them hippies from Chicago wanted to bring a lot of civil rights people into my place. I told him off!"

Golly, the air was nice and tasty and unpolluted down there in Warren County, Mississippi. One Chicagoan growled at us: "Don't just stand there. Breathe deep." We did—and it worked!

We discovered a tombstone in an ancient cemetery at Port Gibson over the grave of one Henry Devine, who died in 1844 at the age of 32. It says, in part: "During the illness which preceded his death he frequently declared that his only wish was to vote for Henry Clay for President. His wish was granted. The last act of his life was to vote the Whig ticket, having done which he declared that he died satisfied."

One heartless Chicagoan cracked: "Good thing he didn't wait for the election returns."