
More than 120 years ago, the United States faced the prospect of the dismemberment of the Union, then only 84 years old. The election of Abraham Lincoln, a Northerner and a Republican, as well as an Anti-Slavery advocate, caused the southern states to threaten to secede from the Union, and South Carolina would actually vote such action on December 20, 1860.

In the nation’s most deliberative body, the Senate of the United States, some of the most distinguished statesmen in our country’s history debated the questions of secession, State’s Rights, slavery and sectionalism. At the 428th regular meeting of The Civil War Round Table on February 17 a distinguished panel of our members will attempt to recreate the mood of that critical period in a discussion of these issues. Ralph G. Newman, a founder of the Round Table, will serve as president pro tempore of the Senate. Marshall Krollick will express the views of the ‘Radical Northern’; and Jim Vlzmy will provide counterpoint with the views of the ‘Radical Southerner’. Balancing the statements of these two members will be Gordon Whitney offering the opinions of the ‘Moderate Northerner’, while Bill Sullivan expresses the position of the ‘Moderate Southerner’.

The general doctrine of the Radical Northerners, as Krollick will express it, can be summarized by the simple, but emotional phrase, “irrepressible conflict.” To these Northerners, it was abundantly clear that final strife, political or physical, between the North and the South was unavoidable and once it began, would not end until the philosophy of one faction would be subjugated to that of the other. Since such conflict was inevitable, the Radical Northerners saw no reason to postpone it by agreeing to the current Southern demands in order to temporarily avoid secession. Thus, their position hardened and, in response, so did that of the Southerners.

In his statement, Vlzmy will use the arguments of Rhett, Yancey and other fire-eaters to support the right, and indeed the necessity of the Southern states to secede and set up a new government that would protect their inalienable rights. The Radical Southerners defended state sovereignty and argued that under the government formed by the founding fathers, each state retained its sovereignty and freedom to express its independence. From the beginning, in their view, the North attempted to change the government into a consolidated despotism, and, by majority rule, to hold the South in subjection.

The ‘Moderate Northerner’s’ viewpoint, as outlined by Whitney, will deal with the importance of the Missouri and Crittenden Compromises as attempts to maintain a balance of power between the North and the South. His remarks will also deal with the animosity engendered by the activities of the Abolitionists centered in New England as they vied against the equally determined Southerners who sought to preserve the institution of slavery through the retention of states rights.

In his appraisal of the ‘Moderate Southerner’, Sullivan will describe him as one torn by his loyalty to the Union and the Constitution, and his distaste for the threats to (continued on page 2)
slavery by the Abolitionist movement in the North. The
Moderates in the South perceived an ever-widening
gulf between themselves and their long-time Democratic
allies in the North. To them, Stephen A. Douglas and his
popular sovereignty doctrine expressed the true mind of all
Northern men. This, they perceived, represented a gradual
undermining of the Constitution.

Ralph Newman, founder of the Round Table in 1940,
has been active in its activities to this date. An Honorary
Award Life Member, he received the Nevins-Freeman
award in 1975. As author, co-author or editor of nine
books including The American Iliad, The Civil War Digest
and Lincoln: His Story in His Own Words, he has received
honorary degrees from seven universities. Currently, he
serves as a trustee of Lincoln College and president of both
the Ulysses S. Grant Association and the Stephen A.
Douglas Association. He also serves as a member of the Board
of Regents of the Lincoln Academy.

Marshall Krolick has been an active member of The
Round Table since 1961 and has served as president, vice-
president, treasurer and tour chairman, as well as editor of
the Round Table’s newsletter for five years. A graduate of
Drake University, he received his law degree from North-
western University in 1962. He is a partner in the Chicago
law firm of Deutsch, Levy & Engel, and has served as
Assistant State’s Attorney of Cook County, Illinois. He
speaks regularly on Civil War topics to civic organizations
and schools, and has addressed numerous other Round
Tables. His talks to our group include “Lee and Longstreet
at Gettysburg” and “The Battle of Brandy Station.”

William Sullivan has both a Bachelor’s and a Master’s
degree from Northwestern University, and is a certified
instructor in history. Currently, he serves as executive
director of the Oak Lawn Historical Society, and as Presi-
dent of the Congress of Illinois State Historical Societies
and Museums. Bill’s service to the Round Table includes
two terms as secretary, assistant treasurer and trustee; he
currently is the Commissary General, a post he has held for
the past five years. He spoke to the Round Table in January
1976 on “The Civil War on the Great Plains.”

A native Chicagoan, James Vlazny received a B.S.
degree in Chemistry from Loyola University in 1963 and a
Ph.D. in Chemistry from the University of Wisconsin in
1968. After graduation, he served as assistant professor of
chemistry at the Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Vir-
iginia, and there developed a strong interest in the Civil War.
A member of the Round Table since 1979, he has served as
trustee and assistant secretary. A resident of Glenview, he
is employed as Licensing Director by Abbott Laboratories.

Gordon Whitney, though born in Grand Rapids,
Michigan, has spent most of his life as a resident of Ham-
mond, Indiana. There he served 23 years in the municipal
fire department, rising to the rank of senior captain. After
retirement in 1974, he purchased a 108 year old farm in the
Ohio River country at Madison, Indiana where he raised
cattle. He recently assumed the duties of Fire Safety Direc-
tor for the nuclear power plant at Marble Hill, Indiana. He
has served as president of the Chicago and Louisville
Round Tables, as well as president of the Hammond Histori-
cal Society. Gordon has relatives who served in the 1st
Michigan Cavalry and the 22nd Michigan Infantry, and
through this heritage, he has become one of the foremost
authorities on the Union Army of the Cumberland, where
those two units served. He last spoke to the Round Table in
March, 1982 on “The Mystery of Spring Hill.”
**January meeting**

The development and use of signalling systems, and particularly the telegraph, in the Civil War was fellow member Myron "Mike" Cohn's topic when he addressed 82 members and guests at The Round Table meeting January 13. In his talk, he gave special emphasis to the man who was largely responsible for developing and implementing the Signal Corps, Albert Meyer.

Mike began by providing some background about signalling itself. He noted that signalling systems of one sort or another have been around for a long time, and explained briefly how the flag signalling system works (flag positions indicated numbers; combinations of numbers formed letters). Mike also pointed out that most messages in the Civil War were in cipher—both sides tried to read enemy flag signals and tap telegraph lines.

During the 1850s Meyer, an army surgeon, developed his flag system (he gained interest in it while working with the deaf). In 1856 he wrote to Secretary of War Jefferson Davis to see if the army would be interested in his system—Davis said no. However, in 1857 he did get his proposal presented to the new secretary of war and in 1859 a board of officers recommended experiments. In these experiments Meyer was assisted by E. Porter Alexander. Meyer's system was recommended for adoption in 1860 and he was given the post of chief signal officer with the rank of major. Interestingly, as Mike pointed out, at First Bull Run Alexander was the Confederate signal officer and played a very important role in letting Beauregard know what the Union was up to. In fact, Mike feels that without the Confederate signal corps the outcome of the battle might have been different.

Although it was called the military telegraph, the telegraph system throughout the Civil War was in civilian hands, and the operators were all civilians—primarily teenage boys. The system was under the command of Anson Stager, a Western Union official who was commissioned a colonel. Meyer, however, developed a different telegraph system, independent of the military telegraph. To make up for his lack of skilled operators, a pointer device was developed, but it worked poorly—the sending and receiving machines often did not synchronize and it was slow.

Realizing that he needed skilled operators, Meyer began advertising for them. Stager complained to Secretary of War Stanton that Meyer was stealing his people and Stanton relieved Meyer of command. However, after the war he was reappointed chief signal officer and was given command of the military telegraph as well. (Mike noted that in contrast to the divided Union communication system, the Confederates had a much more comprehensive organization all under single control.)

After the war men who had served as telegraphers organized and sought recognition as combatants. Despite the fact that they were in constant danger (about 100 telegraphers were killed) and performed a great service for the army in fostering communication, Congress never approved combatant status. Thus, they were never able to receive government benefits or pensions. (Mike gave several examples of the importance of the signal corps and telegraphers. At Gettysburg, a Union signal officer on Little Round Top summoned help when that key position was being threatened by the Confederates. At Chickamauga telegraphers kept Washington in immediate touch with the fighting, continuing to send messages while retreating with the Union forces.)

*The Sitting Lincoln*, located in Grant Park just across Columbus Drive from Buckingham Fountain, is considered by many to be sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens' finest work. But, as reported in an article in the Chicago Tribune in November, the monument is in a seriously deteriorated condition. The face and form of the president are black instead of green, the identifying plaque is missing, the stones around the base of the pedestal are coming loose, and the foundation under the monument is badly eroded.

According to E.V. Buchsbaum, a consulting architect for the Chicago Park District, it would cost $100,000 to repair the monument. Unfortunately no funds are available. Buchsbaum said that if the work is allowed to deteriorate much further the cost of restoration will increase dramatically, or the monument might have to razed. What is needed, he added, is "for some angel or angels to come forward and volunteer the funds required to refurbish the monument." The monument was created by Saint-Gaudens in 1907.

Malcolm Forbes, publisher of Forbes Magazine, recently purchased the last letter that Abraham Lincoln wrote to his wife. According to the Milwaukee Round Table newsletter, the price was $48,000. The letter was sent from Grant's headquarters at City Point on April 2, 1865, 12 days before the assassination.

**Battle of Westport preservation**

Fellow member Lumir Buresh of the Kansas City Round Table has sent the following letter:

"I believe you will be interested in some new battlefield preservation developments in Kansas City. The heaviest fighting in The Battle of Westport took place at the Big Blue River at the Byrams Crossing. This two day part of the three day battle of Westport is called The Battle of The Big Blue. The Battle of Westport Fund Inc. is developing The Big Blue Battlefield Park at the site of the battle.

"The battlefield, for the most part, is located in an open industrial park with a large amount of vacant land. The Monnett Fund has been donated 42.8 acres of the battlefield land with an appraised value of $350,000. We expect to receive four to six additional tracts in the near future. The City of Kansas City and The Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department own all the land adjacent to one side of the River. We hope to acquire all land adjacent to the other side of the River. As the land is acquired it will be developed by the Monnett Fund and then turned over to the Parks and Recreation Department for operation and maintenance.

"The site will include the defensive line, the cliff, trenches, a key ravine, the configuration of the River and Byrams Ford and a part of the old Byrams Ford Road both of which still exist. The Kansas City Landmarks Commission is working with us to place the site on the National Register of Historic Places. Also six additional markers have been placed in Independence to increase our coordinated self guided tour of the Battle of Westport to 31 markers. Guided tours are also conducted."

A concert of Civil War music will be presented by the 1st Brigade Band of Milwaukee on April 14 from 2-5 p.m. at the Chicago Public Library Cultural Center. Tickets, $4 for adults and $2 for children, will be available at the February, March and April meetings or at the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop. They will not be available at the door.
THE NEW BOOKS

(compiled by Dick Clark)


BULLETIN BOARD

Future meetings

Regular meetings are held at the Hotel Continental, 505 N. Michigan, the second Friday in each month, except as noted.

February 17: Marshall Krolick, Bill Sullivan, Jim Vlazny and Gordon Whitney in "Senate Confrontation, November-December, 1860" with Ralph Newman as Pres. Pro. Tem. Note: This is the third Friday of the month.


New member

David J. Lynam, 2012 N. Cleveland Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60614.

A group of New Mexico residents are trying to raise $5,000 to save Pigeon Ranch, a three-room adobe building that figured prominently in the Civil War Battle of Glorieta. The ranch house was alternately used by Union and Confederate forces as a hospital during the 1862 battle, which is sometimes known as the "Gettysburg of the West." The battle was a turning point in the west since the Confederate forces were forced to flee south down the Rio Grande Valley. Contributions can be sent to: Pigeon's Ranch Preservation Committee, P.O. Box 5819, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502.

According to an item in the Lynchburg Round Table newsletter, a Confederate chaplain has been awarded the Confederate Medal of Honor by the S.C.V. The chaplain, Emmeran Bliemel, a Benedictine, served with the 10th Tennessee until he was killed during the Battle of Jonesboro while pronouncing words of absolution over a dying officer. The medal was awarded in a ceremony on the grounds of the Clayton County Courthouse in Jonesboro, Georgia.

The National Underwater and Marine Agency, a private organization, has found what it believes to be the resting place of a Civil War steamer that sank in the Mississippi River in April, 1865, reportedly with $18,000 in gold aboard and with a loss of more than 1,500 lives. The Sultana sank on a trip from Vicksburg to Cairo. On board were more than 2,200 passengers, most of them Union soldiers just out of prison. The 1,000-ton steamer was about nine miles upstream from Memphis, at what is now Mound City, Arkansas, when three of her four boilers exploded. The steamer is now buried in a soybean field northwest of Mound City. Shifts in the river's course have left wrecks buried in silt far from the river's present bed.