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The Battlefield

Newsletter of the Onondaga County Civil War Round Table

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New Meeting Site

Town of DeWitt Community Room

148 Sanders Creek Parkway
East Syracuse, New York

An Evening With the Lincolns

featuring
David and Eileen Patch

Thursday, April 17, 2008
7:00 PM

Meetings are held at 7 PM on the third Thursday of the month from September through June and are free and open to the public.

April Meeting

This month Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln will visit our round table. David and Eileen Patch of Endwell, NY will appear in Civil War garb to portray President Lincoln and Mary in an original play written by Eileen. As the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth nears, the historic couple will revisit their earthly lives and share that visit with us. Their reflections will include humor, pathos and the mundane according to the playwright.

Many of our members will remember Eileen's last appearance before the OCCWRT in April 2006. Dressed as her great grandmother, Sarah Englis, Eileen read excerpts from letters George Englis had written to his mother Sarah while he served in Company K, 89th NYVI. Eileen displayed her talents as a graceful performer and a discerning historian as she relayed George's thoughts in the context of their time. Those letters have been collected, transcribed and annotated in Eileen's first book, *This From George*, the title reflecting George's favorite closing for his letters home. The book is available at www.thisfromgeorge.com.

Both Eileen and David are members of the Binghamton Civil War RT and as active students of the Civil War attend the Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College each year. Eileen has presented before many round tables and organizations. Now as a playwright, Eileen along with husband David will be sought after as they introduce their audiences to both President Lincoln and Mary Todd Lincoln. Join us for an entertaining and informative evening.

Join Us at Our New Meeting Site

If at first you don't succeed, drive everybody crazy and keep trying. And that's what our board has done. They kept at it and have maintained their sanity. Our last three meetings of the year will be held at the Town of DeWitt Community Room within the Sanders Creek Corporate Center off Kinne Rd in East Syracuse.

There's plenty of parking in a brightly-lit parking lot close to the building. The meeting room is spacious, quiet and bright with plenty of tables and chairs for comfortable seating. And...the site is away from the hustle and bustle of downtown.

From 481N take Exit 5W to Kirkville Rd West. Merge onto Kirkville Rd and travel 1.2 miles. Turn right onto Kinne St and travel 0.7 miles. Turn right at Sanders Creek Parkway and travel 0.2 miles to 148 Sanders Creek Parkway, the site of the East Syracuse Fire Department and the Town of DeWitt Community Room.

We hope to see many new faces of members who have strayed since our move downtown. We've missed you and look forward to catching up with you all.

Volunteers Needed

At our March meeting, President Bill Goodwin called for 2-3 volunteers to staff a nominating committee whose job will be to present the final ballot of officers for our 2008-09 year. This is a short-lived committee for we will be voting on these officers at our Annual Meeting this June. After deciding on the nominees, the nominating committee must get the OK from the nominees before the ballot becomes final. The offices of president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and trustee (2) are open. The program chair and newsletter editor are not on the ballot for these two positions are appointed by the president. Our officers and trustees may serve for two consecutive terms. All of the officers are eligible for another term. One trustee, Sue Greenhagen, will have served her two terms. Therefore, her position must have a nominee. As always, nominations may be made from the floor at the June meeting. Please talk to Bill Goodwin if you can help.

Member Book Review

*Scott Cauger has found a jewel of a book that has given him the big picture of the Civil War in just 142 pages. Thanks, Scott, for sharing your thoughtful assessment of **The Civil War: A Concise Account By A Noted Southern Historian** by Grady McWhiney (McWhiney Foundation Press 2005).*

The Civil War is a little treasure I picked up for a mere membership fee in the Civil War Preservation Trust. My token contribution has paid for itself many times over (I have read the book twice and refer to it often). This book is a thorough but concise account of the War Between the States (official name) including events leading up to that great conflict (hereinafter “the War”). In one small volume Mr. McWhiney has summarized and distilled the ancestral, cultural, economic, and political events of the United States from the late 18th century (beginning with the Constitutional Convention of 1787) through the precipitous events of the 1850’s that triggered the great conflict. Mr. McWhiney has done an outstanding job discussing in excellent prose the political compromises, legislation and court cases attempting to avoid the outbreak of war from the Missouri Compromise of 1821 to the last-ditch, failed 1860 Crittenden Compromise (Senator Kentucky).

The Civil War presents, in a summary way, the overarching goals, strategies and tactics of each side - both at the international, national and battle-campaign level. Coverage of the war itself is also balanced and avoids the typical focus on major battles in the eastern theatre of the war and other typical textbook bias. **The Civil War** covers all theatres of war - the West, Trans-Mississippi, and southwest including their respective major battles and the strategies & tactics of the armies and commanders. The coverage of the conflict itself is comprehensive (though cursory) with overviews of the major campaigns and battles by year. Mr. McWhiney even has a section on the American Indian participation in the War and mentions a little known fight “Battle of Newtonia” (September 30, 1862) in the Missouri Ozark region where Indian forces dominated the battle (CSA Choctaws and Cherokees vs. USA Creek loyalists).

Mr. McWhiney weaves domestic and international/diplomatic events into the storyline of military battles and campaigns giving the reader insights into the impact of the war on American politics and international relations. **The Civil War** also takes the reader “Behind the Lines” to discuss, among other things, impact of the war on the northern and southern home fronts including its effect on women, and a brief description of their service, suffering and contributions. Equally important, it is refreshing to find a book that describes, in a responsible and thoughtful way, the southern point of view and the many reasons the South seceded (of which there were several beyond the slavery issue) without any of the usual moral overtones. Mr. McWhiney also does a fine job summarizing and analyzing northern and southern advantages/disadvantages, numerical data, resources and the ultimate costs of the War.

To conclude, Mr. McWhiney has distilled in this little volume a large amount of knowledge, research, insights, and analysis. **The Civil War** is an easy-to-read, well-written account of the events leading up to the War, the conflict itself, and its aftermath. Mr. McWhiney can be forgiven for some typos in regional battle maps (wrong years/right dates) and mistakenly concluding that the Battles of Wilson’s Creek (Mo.) and Pea Ridge (Ark) enabled Union Forces “...to gain control of Missouri...” In a sweeping statement regarding the early years of the War. (Wilson Creek in August 10, 1861, was an early, major CSA victory while Pea Ridge was a significant, tactical Union victory March 7-8, 1862).

Those minor imperfections aside, it is unusual to find a modern historian who dispassionately discusses the harmful consequences of the War including military occupation of the South and reduction of that region to Colonial status for decades thereafter. While emancipation was an obvious, positive outcome of the War, it is rare to find a book that discusses the many other ways it changed our nation (some arguably not good) and the full legacy - positive and negative - of that conflict. Mr. McWhiney is completely correct in his assessment that, “[t]he Civil War ...disrupted a way of life and changed the course of American history as significantly as the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution changed French and Russian history.”

Why No Birthday Cake, Part 2

Last month’s newsletter noted that the celebration of Jefferson Davis’ 200th birthday this June has turned into a lost cause - not much excitement or recognition on a national level. Historian James McPherson, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for his one volume history of the Civil War, **Battle Cry of Freedom**, believes no official celebration should occur.

In a recent article in the **Arizona Republic**, McPherson concedes that Davis’ antebellum career was illustrious: a West Point graduate, Mississippi senator and secretary of war. Yet McPherson says Davis’ achievements were “largely eclipsed” by his role in setting the stage for and then waging the bloodiest war in this nation’s history. Davis comes across, McPherson says, as an “unreconstructed rebel who never really accepted with anything like good grace the defeat of the Confederacy and continued for the rest of his life to write and speak in a way that said, ‘We were right. We lost this war, not because we were wrong, but because the enemy was more powerful and more ruthless.’”

McPherson cites Davis’ two-volume **The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government**, written at Beauvoir during Davis’ last years, as “the Bible of the Lost Cause” which according to McPherson can hardly be seen as an apology. What do you think? The newsletter welcomes all opinions.

Ted Jones Puzzlers

Ted, a retired history teacher from Pennsylvania now living in Oswego, has made his mark as a man of Civil War wisdom each January in our Jeopardy Challenge. This past month Ted continued the Jeopardy Challenge with “puzzler” (his title) emails to me. They are deserving of a wider audience.

1. This Union cavalry general was a musician and band leader in his civilian life.
2. The Army of the Potomac won the first Battle of Bull Run. True or False

Puzzler Answers

If you check General Joe Johnston’s correspondence in the Official Records for the Battle of First Bull Run, his letters are clearly marked from the Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac. Therefore Question 2 is technically true.

It has been one of the most brilliant cavalry exploits of the war, and will be handed down in history as an example to be imitated.

Still a colonel in July 1863, Benjamin Henry Grierson led a successful 600 mile raid within Mississippi to divert Pemberton’s attention from Grant’s crossing of the Mississippi south of Vicksburg. Grant assessed the raid in the O.R. by saying, “It has been one of the most brilliant cavalry exploits of the war, and will be handed down in history as an example to be imitated.”

Think You've Seen Everything?

The staple of the Union army in the field was hardtack, a thick, hard cracker three and one-half inches square. Issued in one-pound packages, it was made from flour, water, and salt and had been the staple of the army since the Mexican War (1846-1848). Known as teethdullers, worm castles, stonebread and a variety of other disparaging titles, it could be eaten with no preparation, but soldiers found creative ways to make it more palatable.



Now a Japanese designer has taken hardtack one step further and designed edible/disposable tableware made entirely of hardtack for a Japanese cafe. It's completely biodegradable and certainly better for the environment than plastic or styrofoam dinnerware and has a long shelf life. A question does remain to be answered though. How quickly does one have to eat his wonton soup?

Obama Genealogy

The New England Historical Genealogical Society founded in 1845, the oldest and largest nonprofit genealogical organization in the country, has revealed the distant cousins of Senator Barack Obama. They include George W. Bush, Gerald Ford, LBJ, Harry Truman, Winston Churchill, Georgia O'Keefe and the Duchess of Windsor. Obama who could become the first African-American president is also linked by ancestry to Robert E. Lee, the man who commanded the armies of the Southern slave-holding states. What an odd family reunion this group would have!

Abraham Lincoln's Estate

A myth exists that when Abraham Lincoln died on April 15, 1865, 143 years ago, he died a poor man. After all claims on the estate had been paid each of the three heirs, Mary, Robert and Tad, received \$36,991.54. Upon the death of Robert's younger brother Tad in 1871, Robert and Mary each received half of the \$35,000 which Tad had. Upon the death of Mary Lincoln in 1882, Robert inherited Mary's estate which totaled \$84,035.00.

Tourist/Son

Robert Lincoln's last major public appearance was on May 30, 1922 on the occasion of the dedication of the memorial to his father in Washington. Because of his poor health, plus his personal inclinations, Robert did not speak though applause greeted him as he walked to his seat on the platform. The memorial pleased Robert; it was said that whenever he went out for a drive in the capital, "the itinerary always included a turn around the temple on the Mall and that as the car approached the steps he would call to the chauffeur, 'Stop the carriage' and looking up at the luminous, brooding figure of his father, he would exclaim, 'Isn't it beautiful?'"

Our May 8th Meeting

Mark your calendar. Our May meeting will be held on the second Thursday of the month, May 8th, to accommodate the speaking schedule of our very special guest. Prepare yourself for an evening of Gettysburg history delivered with almost unsustainable enthusiasm. **Do not** - I repeat - **do not** offer our speaker a cup of coffee! Our new spacious meeting site will be able to handle as many guests as you care to invite. More details in the May newsletter. This will be a very special evening.

Onondaga County Civil War Round Table

New Membership/Renewal Form

Membership dues of the OCCWRT are:

Please Check one of the Following

_____ \$20.00 a year

_____ O.H.A. members \$10.00

_____ Seniors and Students \$15.00

_____ Family rate (2 or more) \$30.00

Dues may be paid at meetings or sent to:

Onondaga County Civil War Round Table

ATTN: Richard Walker, Treasurer

307 Sherbrooke Rd

Manlius, NY 13104

Please find \$ _____ enclosed in form of

Circle One:

Check M.O. Cash

Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

Please check if you prefer an emailed newsletter and can receive an Acrobat (pdf) file.

E-Mail _____

The Onondaga County Civil War Round Table was organized in 1994 and is now an incorporated non-profit educational organization. Meetings are held on the third Thursday of the month from September through June. The purpose of the OCCWRT is to stimulate and encourage interest in the American Civil War, to assist in community service in order to enhance the study and understanding of the Civil War, to provide educational and historical research of the period, and to promote historic preservation.

Onondaga County
Civil War Round Table PO Box 175 Tully, NY 13159-0175

Circle May 8th On Your Calendar