

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

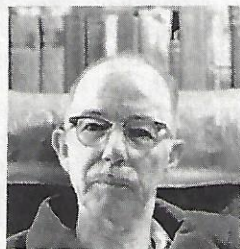
Volume XXXVII, Number 8

Chicago, Illinois

April, 1977

ELDEN E. "JOSH" BILLINGS on SHERMAN: A CRITICAL CHARACTER SKETCH

Elden E. ("Josh") Billings, a member of our Round Table and certainly one of our most knowledgeable and respected Civil War historians, will address us on April 15, 1977. Josh has chosen for his topic "Sherman: A Critical Character Sketch." In his remarks, Josh will emphasize the General's weaknesses rather than his strengths. He will question many of history's accepted facts about William T. Sherman, such as his reputation as, next to Grant, the most outstanding Union commander in our Civil War. Many writers even contend that Sherman was more able than Grant, yet some of his own contemporaries thought that he was insane. In his critical evaluation Josh will attempt to assess Sherman's true position in military history and to place in perspective his repeated failures as a battlefield technician. Sherman's life prior to the Civil War will be mentioned briefly to bring forth those facts necessary to an understanding of his wartime activities. His wartime career will be analyzed in chronological order to show his growth as a field commander and as an administrator of large armies, and a brief summary of Sherman's postwar career will also be mentioned.



Elden E. ("Josh") Billings

Josh Billings graduated from the University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington, before accepting a graduate scholarship in Washington, D.C. Subsequently, he chose to stay in the East, working at the Library of Congress as an Analyst in International Trade and Finance with the Congressional Research Service. Josh retired in 1973 after 38 years service. During World War II he spent two and one-half years in the China-Burma-India Theater, making over 40 flights over the Himalayas into China. He was decorated for 25 missions.

Josh is a former president of both the District of Columbia Civil War Round Table and of the Lincoln Group. From 1958 to 1965 he was a member of the District of Columbia Civil War Centennial Commission and also served for 17 years as curator of the Columbia Historical Society. For some time, he conducted, in Civil War Times Illustrated, a monthly column on unpublished diaries and letters of the Civil War. A member of Phi Alpha Theta honorary historical fraternity, he is spending his retirement studying and addressing Civil War Round Tables, Lincoln Groups and other similar organizations on Civil War and Lincoln topics.

William T. Sherman began his Civil War career as a colonel of the 13th U.S. Infantry on May 14, 1861. He later saw action at First Bull Run. In August of that year he became a brigadier general and the following month was sent to Kentucky to assist in holding the state. It was during

this period that Sherman's volatile temperament got him into trouble with many newspaper correspondents. Several reported Sherman to be unstable and even mentally deranged. As a result, he was relieved by General Buell, with instructions to report to General Halleck in St. Louis. Placed in a field command, Sherman's division, on the defense perimeter at Shiloh, was surprised and overrun by Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston during the opening of that bloody battle. Despite this, Shiloh eventually resulted in a Union victory and Sherman was made major general of volunteers as of May 1, 1862.



360th REGULAR MEETING

* * *

ELDEN E. BILLINGS

on

Sherman: A Critical Character Sketch

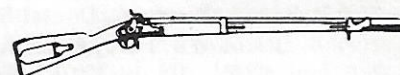
Friday, April 15, 1977

* * *

Chicago Bar Association,
29 South LaSalle Street

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m.

Dinner at 6:30 p.m.



Please take special note that, because of Good Friday, this month's meeting will take place on the third Friday of the month, rather than the second as is normal.

Sherman was involved in the several operations to open the Mississippi River, including the assault at Chickasaw Bluffs, the capture of Arkansas Post, and the eventual campaign which resulted in the surrender of Vicksburg, in which he directed the Fifteenth Corps. He also participated in the relief of Rosecrans' army at Chattanooga, later leading

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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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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 60067.



Yet another Civil War museum has been opened recently, this one in the Old Exchange Building, Sycamore and Bank Streets, in Petersburg, Virginia. Entitled the Siege Museum, its exhibits will include period furniture and artifacts depicting life in the city during 1864-65. While we cannot comment on the historical interest and value of this collection without further information, at least its approach is a welcome departure from the hackneyed "rusty musket and weathered minie ball" style.

from the Editor's pen



Well, it's that time again. On May 4 approximately one hundred members of The Round Table, their ladies, and guests will depart on our annual Battlefield Tour. For most of them, this is a regular event, one in which they participate very year. To many the sites will be as familiar as their own home, for they have visited each place countless times before, either on their own or on a previous Tour. And yet back they come without fail, without even a thought of not going because they've seen it all before.

Those who have never been might ask why and, if they did, the answer they would get would probably be "Because its the Battlefield Tour". Sure, that begs the question, but to those who go its answer enough. What they're saying is really quite simple. It's not the places themselves that make them set aside the first weekend in May, it's the experience, maybe even the people and what they bring to each other.

To analyze that experience, you must look at many things. Of course there is the scholarship, the chance to learn by listening to those who know and seeing the ground and thus make three-dimensional what has previously only come to us from the printed page. The words of an Ed Bearrs, as he brings to life the drama of battle; the lump in your throat when J. Ambler Johnston pulls Stonewall Jackson's watch from his pocket as we stand on the ground of Chancellorsville—these moments are "The Battlefield Tour".

Then, too, there are the good times, the fun of comradeship with old friends. The sing-alongs as Miles Janousek pounds the piano; Pete Johnson running up the aisle to throw peanuts at the dancers on the showboat at Vicksburg; those same dancers turning their backs and lifting their skirts to prominently display Al Meyer's smile buttons; Will Plank's car stuck in the mud at Manassas; Ver Lynn Sprague in the washroom at Gettysburg; the birth of the Schimmelfennig legend on a restaurant signboard in Mississippi; your editor being presented with a live pork chop at Schimmelfennig's headquarters in Gettysburg; Mike Lerner and Charley Falkenburg choosing to go down with their bus rather than face a Trans-Mississippi rain-storm; Tuckertee Ridge; Dan Lapinski and John Commerford bursting from their Shenandoah Valley motel room in their shorts as lit sparklers stuck through the keyholes lend the appearance of truth to false cries of fire—these moments are "The Battlefield Tour".

We cannot overlook the awards and those who have been lucky, or unlucky as the case may be, enough to win them. The look on the face of a true Daughter of the Confederacy as we thank her for opening her ante-bellum home to us by presenting her with the bust of Abraham Lincoln; the treasured Bafart Award, that hollow cane awarded for excellence in imbibing, a prize which caused each competitor to strive for even greater performance; the Confederate Purple Heart, meticulously created by John Margreiter and given without a straight face for sacrifice beyond the call of duty—these moments are "The Battlefield Tour".

And, perhaps most importantly of all, for each of these moments there is the memory. Whether within your own mind or around the table wherever Round Table members gather, the stories are told and retold over and over. Each time the laugh wells up again, the wistful smile appears. Some of the old regulars are gone now, Warren Reeder, Heine Bass, Gil Twiss, Hal Hixson, Will Leonard, and too many more; but each year as we get on that bus their spirit is already aboard, and so it will always be. The feeling they had is handed down to us and we in turn will pass it on. That too is "The Battlefield Tour", and thus the only question left is "Where to next year?"

MARCH MEETING

There were sixty-eight members and guests on hand on March 11 to greet Dr. William E. Parrish, Professor of History at Westminster College, as he discussed for us the colorful "Bohemian Brigade", the eastern journalists who covered the war in Missouri in 1861. Dr. Parrish began his remarks by taking us back to the month of May in the opening year of the war as two reporters from New York newspapers arrived in St. Louis. They found that Lyon's federal forces had recently taken Camp Jackson from the Confederates. An uneasy quiet prevailed as General Harney, who had replaced Lyon in overall command, had agreed with Sterling Price that the Federals would stay in St. Louis while the Confederates held their ground outside the city.

By the end of May, however, this unusual pact had broken down. A conference between Lyon, who had succeeded Harney, and Blair, on the one hand, and Claiborne Jackson and Price on the other produced nothing as Lyon left the meeting threatening to march on Jefferson City. This he soon did, but when he reached the Missouri capitol, accompanied by several of the eastern journalists, he found the Confederates had evacuated toward Booneville. Lyon followed and soon chased the Southerners out of that city after a skirmish. However, the story sent back east by Mr. Knox of the New York Herald made the action sound like a major battle during which the members of the press played a major military role. In fact, the reporters spent most of the day, as did many of the Union soldiers, in looting the abandoned Confederate camps.

From Booneville, Lyon started out on what was to be a five-week pursuit of Price toward Springfield, Missouri. En route, the General spent much time in candid interviews with the journalists, most of whom were his firm supporters. Their favorable stories, which took almost ten days to reach the editorial offices of their papers, gave Lyon national prominence.

On August 10, Lyon was killed during the federal defeat at Wilson's Creek. Frank Wilkie, the New York Times correspondent, wrote a brilliant account of the battle and this story, together with the dispatches of the other reporters penned as the army retreated to Rolla, assured Lyon of immortality. The press on the scene credited the Confederate victory to overwhelming numbers.

Instead of stopping at Rolla, the journalists returned to St. Louis where they found the flamboyant John C. Fremont in command. In contrast to the relationship they had enjoyed with Lyon, they found Fremont inaccessible, unwilling to grant interviews. Frustrated, Wilkie sought out General Sturgis who disclosed that his division had been ordered to Lexington. As they marched out, Wilkie joined them. Soon Sturgis learned that Price was waiting for him, so Sturgis turned his column toward Kansas City. Upset over the lack of action, Wilkie became drunk one evening, mounted his horse and rode straight into Price's camp at Lexington. Recognized after a night in jail, Wilkie was thanked by the Confederates because of the fairness of his article on Wilson's Creek. Price allowed him to stay in his camp and while there he witnessed the battle of Lexington, interviewing the federal General Mulligan after the latter's capture. The story he wrote and later filed from St. Louis marked the first time a war correspondent reported from the enemy's camp.

Fremont, now forced to take the field, organized his army at Jefferson City. Here a group of twenty eastern reporters congregated, and engaged in countless hi-jinx, at a former old hotel. Their hilarious escapades soon earned them the sobriquet "The Bohemian Brigade". However, they also found time for work and their stories were sharply critical of Fremont. The army marched to Springfield, but, on arrival, went into camp. Again the reporters wrote unfavorably of Fremont. Finally, the government, too, tired of "The Pathfinder's" inactivity and relieved him. His replacement

TO THE CAMPFOLLOWERS (LADIES)

Melissa Boffey regaled the group with an intriguing talk on The Medal of Honor and other awards bestowed by both sides, the north and the south, during the Civil War. Her remarks were illustrated with a series of slides. The graphically depicted delineation of the evolution of the design of the various medals, including the Purple Heart, which was designed by George Washington, was fascinating. We are very grateful to our charming speaker and wish her much luck in future appearances. There will not be a meeting in April, but please be sure to watch for the notice of the May meeting, at which our guest speaker will be a member of The Civil War Round Table.

At eleven o'clock a.m. on April 15, 1977, the Sons of Union Veterans will sponsor the Twenty-First Annual Lincoln Tomb Ceremony in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield. During the ceremony, several Illinois Round Tables will present wreaths. Following the ceremony, a luncheon to be held at the State House Inn will feature as the principal speaker John Cox, Superintendent of Camp Butler.

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University of Chicago Professor of History, and our own member, Dr. John Hope Franklin, was recently presented with a distinguished service award by the Chicago Association of Black Journalists. The presentation was part of the program at a reception in honor of the beginning of Black History Week.

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In a speech delivered on the floor of the United States Senate on January 25th, 1977, Senator Mark Hatfield, of Oregon, introduced a joint resolution designed to restore the citizenship of Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy. In his remarks, which are reprinted in full in Volume 123, Number 13, of the Congressional Record, Mr. Hatfield detailed the career of Mr. Davis and also discussed the treatment he received after the War had ended. After Mr. Hatfield concluded, Senator Allen of Alabama spoke in support of the resolution and urged all members of the Senate to read Hudson Strode's biography of Davis in order to gain a better appreciation of the man. The resolution introduced by Mr. Hatfield has been referred to the Committee on the Judiciary, and, as of this writing, we are unaware of any subsequent action upon it.

decided to retreat without a battle, ending the campaign. As the army moved back, the journalists, many of whom would gain great prominence as the war went on, wrote of the desolation already imposed by the conflict on the people of Missouri.

RESERVE THE DATE!
June 10, 1977
NEVINS-FREEMAN AWARD DINNER
HONORING LLOYD MILLER
Entertainment by the
Schimmelfennig Singers

THE NEW BOOKS



(Compiled by Dick Clark)

Belz, Herman. *A New Birth of Freedom*. The Republican Party and Freedmen's Rights, 1861 to 1866. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976. \$16.95

Boardman, Fon Wyman. *America and the Civil War Era, 1850-1875*. New York: Henry Z. Walck, 1976. \$8.95

Cohen, Stan. *The Civil War in West Virginia: A Pictorial History*. Missoula, Montana: Gateway Printing & Litho, 1976. pbk. \$5.00

Crown, Francis J., editor *Confederate Postal History*. Edited and with introduction by ... Lawrence, Mass.: Quarterman Publications, Inc., 1976. \$30.00 An anthology of 28 articles that originally appeared in *The Stamp Specialist* between 1939 and 1948.

Griscom, George L. *Fighting with Ross' Texas Cavalry Brigade, C.S.A.* The Diary of George L. Griscom, Adjutant, 9th Texas Cavalry Regiment. Edited by Homer L. Kerr. Hillsboro, Texas: Hill Junior College Press, 1976. \$9.50

Heck, Frank Hopkins. *Proud Kentuckian, John C. Breckinridge, 1821-1875*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976. \$3.95

Jones, Virgil Carrington. *Gray Ghosts and Rebel Raiders*. With a foreword by Bruce Catton. Atlanta: Mockingbird Books, 1976. Pbk. combined 2-vol. edition. \$2.95. Original of 1956.

Pember, Phoebe Yates. *A Southern Woman's Story*. Life in Confederate Richmond. Including unpublished letters written from the Chimborazo Hospital. Edited by Bell I. Wiley. Atlanta: Mockingbird Books, 1977. Pbk \$1.75. Original of 1959 (and 1879).

Tegland, Janet, ed. *Ulysses S. Grant: The Remarkable True-Life Story of the Civil War General and Peacetime President*. Dramatized in all-pictorial presentation. Skokie, Ill.: Dayco Pub. Co. \$5.95

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

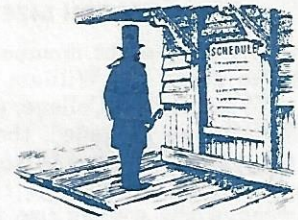
Weisberger, Bernard A. *Reporters for the Union*. Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976. \$18.25. Reprint of the 1953 edition.

Inspector General Charles Wesselhoft has announced that the quiz to be presented at the April Meeting will be taken from T. R. Hay's "Hood's Tennessee Campaign". Boning up for Charlie's questions should also provide an excellent background for this year's annual Battlefield Tour, as our destination is, of course, Middle Tennessee.

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The new Lincoln Home National Historic Site Visitor's Center, in Springfield, recently was dedicated and opened to the public. Located in a twelve acre, cobblestoned, four city block historic district, which includes the 138 year old Lincoln Family Residence, the Visitor's Center reflects a typical 19th Century environment. The recently-opened facility includes two auditoriums where visitors will see a 26 minute film "Mr. Lincoln's Springfield" before they tour the district. The entire complex is within walking distance of several other landmarks, including the Lincoln Law Office and the restored Old State Capitol.

BULLETIN BOARD



FUTURE MEETINGS

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

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

Daniel Koen, 916 Elmwood Avenue, Evanston, Illinois 60202.

Earl W. Winship, 3300 Lake Shore Drive, Apt. 4-A, Chicago, Illinois 60657.

Frank J. Williams, R.F.D. Hope Valley Road, Hope Valley, Rhode Island.

John P. Wolgamot, 2303 W. Greenleaf, Chicago, Illinois 60645.

J. T. Schwegler, c/o The Standard Register Company, 20 N. Wacker Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60606.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Frank K. Curtis, 273 Lyons Road, Bollingbrook, Illinois 60439.

Col. James M. McGarity, 360 Bay Meadows Drive, Naples, Florida 33940.

Radio and television personality Arthur Godfrey has joined the efforts of three foundations to examine the sunken remains of the Monitor, which lies off the coast of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. The project hopes to film the vessel, collect artifacts from it, and explore the possibility of raising her from the sea.

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the assault on the Confederate right on Missionary Ridge. Here his men were roughly handled by Pat Cleburn's troops. After Grant's promotion to chief command of the armies of the United States, Sherman assumed the leadership of all Federal forces in the western theater. Thus began the period which was to be his most successful. It was also the inauguration of the theory of total destruction upon the civilian population, before an advancing army. His victorious campaign to capture Atlanta was followed by the famous "March to the Sea". After cutting a path of devastation forty miles wide thru Georgia, he moved northward into the Carolinas and the eventual surrender of General Joseph Johnston.