

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume XXXIX, Number 3

Chicago, Illinois

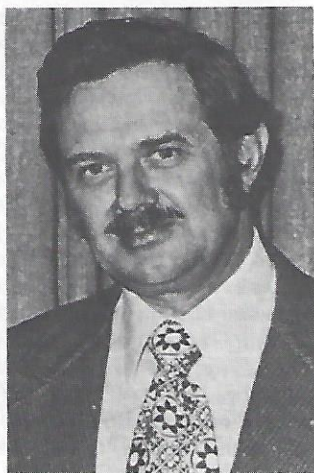
November, 1978

GORDON WHITNEY ON GENERAL JEFFERSON C. DAVIS

The Round Table meeting on November 10 will feature a talk on Jefferson Davis by past president and fellow member Gordon Whitney. However, Gordon does not intend to discuss the President of the Confederacy. Rather, his subject will be Union General Jefferson Columbus Davis.

General Davis was born on his father's farm just outside Memphis, Indiana in 1829, the oldest of eight children.

Following service in the Mexican War, he remained in the army and at the outbreak of the Civil War was stationed at Fort Sumter. He rose rapidly and was in command of divisions at Pea Ridge, Stones River and Chickamauga. During the Atlanta campaign Davis had command of the 14th Corps. He made the march to the sea with Sherman and remained in the army after the War. General Davis died at the Palmer House in Chicago in 1879.

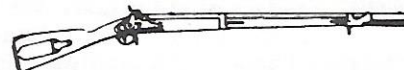


Gordon Whitney

Although Davis had a long army career, it was not particularly notable. Instead, he is probably best remembered for the shooting of his superior officer, General William "Bull" Nelson, in a Louisville hotel in 1862. As Gordon will point out, so much of this tragedy has been covered up through the years that the real story and the circumstances leading up to the shooting have never been known. However, it is clear the incident had a profound effect on the course of the War in the West, literally changing the result of one major battle. It also had a dramatic impact on the remainder of Davis's life.

In his remarks, Gordon intends to cover the General's career, centering around the events before and after the shooting. He will discuss both the political and military aspects of this affair and bring out the facts of the case. His purpose is to attempt to dispel the myths that have developed over the years because of what he calls the rash and irresponsible reporting by incompetent historians who have not provided the true story.

Jefferson C. Davis has been a particular interest of Gordon's for many years, an interest originally sparked by the fact that he had the same name as the Confederate President and because he was a Hoosier. Gordon's research on the general during the past 10 years has led him all over the country. Since so little has been written about Davis, however, the search for information has been difficult. Gordon hopes to one day write a book about the General.



375th Regular Meeting

* * *

Gordon Whitney

on

General Jefferson C. Davis

Friday, November 10, 1978

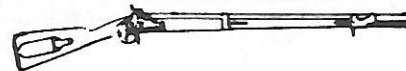
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Chicago Bar Association

29 South LaSalle Street

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m.

Dinner at 6:30 p.m.



Although born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Gordon Whitney spent most of his life as a resident of Hammond, Indiana. He served that city for 23 years as a member of its fire department, rising to the rank of senior captain. While a member of the department, he authored a history of it and instituted an archives in the main fire station. After retiring from municipal service, Gordon spent several years in private business before moving with his family in 1974 to a 108-year-old farm just outside the Ohio River community of Madison, Indiana. There, he has been involved in raising Angus and Hereford cattle plus the task of restoring the old farmhouse. He has also purchased a building in Madison which was owned at one time by the family of Civil War General E.R.S. Canby. Gordon also has spent much time on the process of restoring this structure.

Gordon was President of The Round Table in 1973-74 and served as president of the Louisville Round Table in 1976-77. He has also been president of the Hammond Historical Society. Gordon's ties to the Civil War are strong as he had relatives in both the 1st Michigan cavalry and the 22nd Michigan infantry. His interest in the latter regiment, and his resulting study of the western theater of the War in which it served, has led to his becoming one of our foremost authorities on the campaigns of the Army of the Cumberland. Gordon has spoken to the St. Louis, Louisville, Kansas City and Milwaukee Round Tables. This will be his second appearance as a speaker before our Round Table.

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



FOUNDED DECEMBER 3, 1940

18 East Chestnut Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611

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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.



FOURTH ANNUAL NATIONAL CONGRESS OF CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLES

by Henry Pomerantz

Once again, we extend our sincere congratulations to Jerry Russell for putting together an outstanding program of speakers and activities. The Fourth Annual National Congress of Civil War Round Tables convened in

Richmond, Virginia on September 28, 1978. Those in attendance were privileged to hear the events of 1861-1865 described by such eminent historians as "Bud" Robertson and Bob Krick, and to tour the neighboring battlefields with the incomparable Ed Bearss. However, as was true with the previous three assemblies, the main theme and purpose of this Congress was battlefield preservation.

The problems which confront those dedicated to maintaining the sites of our national heritage are, unfortunately, still numerous. Among these are the destruction of battlefield sites by urban encroachment, such as the construction of Interstate 295 around Richmond and the development of housing projects at Cold Harbor and Chancellorsville, the use of National Battlefield Parks as recreation sites, the inaccurate and circus-like atmosphere of the historical interpretation programs at some Battlefield Parks, the continued deterioration of historic structures and monuments by the ravages of time and vandalism, and the intrusion of high density traffic through and around Battlefield Parks and other historic sites, thus preventing valid interpretation.

However, within the past twelve months, there have been some beneficial developments. At Manassas, additional land at the Wheller Farm and near Sudley Church has been purchased by the Park Service and the property near the Stone Bridge is in the process of being acquired. The Harris Bill, which would add the area of Groveton to the Battlefield Park is still being held up in Congress by the two Senators from Virginia, but pressure is mounting to obtain passage. On September 21, 1978, Brawner's Farm became eligible to be registered as a national landmark, thus insuring that the proposed I-66 Interchange will not pass through this area.

At Fredericksburg-Chancellorsville, additional acquisitions have been made, such as the Lacy House, Salem Church and the Wilderness Tavern. Unfortunately, soon after the long struggle to purchase the latter structure was successfully completed, it burned to the ground. However, the Park Service has plans to rebuild it and thus restore it to its original condition at the time of the battle.

At Gettysburg, the Park Service has purchased Fantasyland and will proceed to demolish this non-historic eyesore. In its report on Gettysburg, President Carter's Advisory Council has recommended the removal of the Peacelight Inn, an old motel on the first day's field, the purchase of the Benner's Hill area, the restoration of the McPherson Farm, the removal of post-war forestry, which alters the field of vision from that which existed in 1863, the closing of non-historic roads within the Park, and the relocation of the present visitors' center away from the area of Pickett's Charge. Over \$8,000,000 has been programmed to be invested at Gettysburg in these and other projects of historical importance.

It is apparent that the activities fostered by the prior Congresses, and the resulting publicity and letter writing campaigns, have resulted in beneficial governmental action at Antietam and Manassas. Similar support is needed to press for the passage of the Harris Bill, to further protect Manassas, and to create National Battlefield Parks at Five Forks and Monocacy. The latter is a pet project of Ed Bearss. To assist us in these and other such campaigns, the Congress authorized the retaining of a registered lobbyist to represent the battlefield preservation interests in Congress. However, that alone is certainly not enough. Every Round Table member should keep informed as to further developments, and should make his feelings known to his own Congressman and other influential members of the Senate and House of Representatives. In addition, contributions should be sent immediately to the Civil War Sites Fund administered by *Civil War Times Illustrated*. Only in these ways can we insure the preservation of these important historical locations so that our national heritage can be passed on to those who will come after us.

OCTOBER MEETING

The "trash, fiction and lies" found in the Lincoln assassination literature was the subject of Dr. Harold Hyman's remarks when he addressed 102 members and guests on October 13. The major part of his discussion focused on *The Lincoln Conspiracy*, the book and movie from Schick Sunn Classics which maintain that Booth did not die at Garrett's farm. Rather, they claim, a man named Boyd was killed there, and high government officials who had been involved in a plot to eliminate Lincoln conspired to conceal the mistake.

Dr. Hyman began his remarks by quoting a letter written in 1885 by John Usher, who had been Lincoln's Secretary of the Interior. In it, Usher expressed his concern over what he termed the "trash, fiction and lies" being spread about Lincoln's assassination and subsequent events. Dr. Hyman then surveyed for us the general literature on this topic. His purpose, he said, was to see if it did indeed fit Usher's description.

Dr. Hyman noted that the subject of Lincoln's assassination has been a popular one for both amateur and professional writers and historians. How it has been treated, however, has differed considerably with the times. Thus, as he explained, the conspiracy theory has been in and out of fashion at various points during the past 100 years. Today it has arisen again.

One of the first to suggest a conspiracy theory, according to Hyman, was David DeWitt who, in 1895, published *The Judicial Murder of Mary Surratt*. In that book he stressed alleged irregularities in the trial proceedings and concluded there was a scheme to railroad those involved. DeWitt used legal research methods and drew on the 1865 trial testimony, the trial record of Surratt's son, John, and the Johnson impeachment record. He ignored diaries and other such primary sources, however, and also paid no attention to prevailing legal procedures of the time. Thus, he did not consider whether or not the decision which might have resulted from a civil trial would have been particularly different.

Other writers carried on in the DeWitt tradition (of poor scholarship), but they were all only preliminaries to Dr. Otto Eisenschiml who inflated the Lincoln conspiracy theory considerably by raising doubts which were not supported by any evidence. Eisenschiml's procedure was to ask whether or not something might have been the case even though there were no facts to suggest such a question.

Eisenschiml was followed by Theodore Roscoe who, in 1959, wrote *The Web of Conspiracy*. This book, which argued for a Stanton conspiracy, drew no serious notice. However, in the 1970's Roscoe became a major consultant to Schick Sunn Classics Productions. Dr. Hyman noted that according to Schick Sunn, the government had forced Roscoe's book out of print. However, when he himself wrote to the publisher, Prentice-Hall, he was told that Roscoe had requested that all future rights revert to himself, and that the request had been granted. Another major source of Schick Sunn information, explained Dr. Hyman, is a collection of papers held by Ray Neff, a professor of physical education at a university in Indiana. Neff and his documents (which Mr. Neff will not make available for examination), and Roscoe are, in Hyman's opinion, very suspect as authoritative experts.

In beginning his analysis of *The Lincoln Conspiracy* itself, Dr. Hyman discussed the authors, David Balsiger and Charles E. Sellier, Jr., neither of whom have any qualifications as historians. He also pointed out that in addition to the Neff collection, many of the manuscripts and papers on which the book is based were supplied by an obscure Boston document dealer named Joseph Lynch. However, Dr. Hyman said, it is unclear which documents are supposed to support which claims, or whether the authors saw the originals or only transcriptions. Dr. Hyman described his attempts to obtain permission from

Schick Sunn to examine the various documents which were used by the authors and how he was refused each time.

He also discussed at some length the footnotes in the book. As he explained, although footnotes in a scholarly work are sacred and must be capable of verification by others, those in *The Lincoln Conspiracy* are filled with defects, such as misidentifications, lack of page, volume and edition numbers, and no indication of where supporting documents can be found. In addition, he noted that many sources used are unreliable, including Eisenschiml, the Neff papers, secondary sources, etc. Thus, overall, Dr. Hyman feels at least 500 of the 1108 footnotes are unreliable. Zero per cent error is considered acceptable by reputable historians.

Beyond the problem with the footnotes, Dr. Hyman pointed out there are numerous substantive errors in the book and many of the "scientific tests" supposedly used are not explained. For instance, who gave lie detector tests to whom? He thus concluded that *The Lincoln Conspiracy* is "a ripoff" and clearly fits in Usher's "trash, fiction and lies" category.

Although a Stanton heir is suing for misuse of the family name, which may force some of the alleged documents out, thus exposing the fraud, Dr. Hyman feels the damage done by such false but heavily promoted and widely disseminated versions of history is serious. Corrective monographs and footnotes will not receive similar publicity and students will grow up with misconceptions of history. He concluded that those, like Schick Sunn, who spread such garbage make Lincoln's warning to feel malice toward none very difficult.

Treasurer Marvin Sanderman has announced that all those whose dues have not been paid by the November meeting will be dropped from the membership roster and mailing list.

It is with deep regret that we announce the recent death of our member Robert L. O'Grady, of Dundee. All of us extend our sincere condolences to his family.

We are sorry to learn that Civil War students have, temporarily we hope, lost the services of a most dedicated and competent friend. Patrick Reed, who, for several years, has served as Superintendent of the Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Park, has been transferred by the Park Service to Cape Hatteras National Seashore in North Carolina. Pat's tenure at Wilson's Creek has been marked by great strides in restoration and preservation of the Battlefield and its landmarks. Regardless of the competency of his replacement, the ability and dedication of Pat Reed will be sorely missed. Your Newsletter staff will have more comment on the transfer policy of the National Park Service in a future issue.

A replica of a Civil War cannon has been placed in front of the University of Louisville School of Law as a memorial to Union General John A. Logan, of Illinois, who graduated from the school in 1851. The belated honor was a result of the joint efforts of Dr. John A. Dillon, Jr., the school's former Vice President for Academic Affairs, retired University of Louisville Registrar, John M. Houchens, and Commander Jack Deal, former commanding officer of the Louisville Naval Ordnance Station. The cannon was constructed in their off-duty hours by the employees of the Naval Ordnance Station.

THE NEW BOOKS



(Compiled by Dick Clark)

Escott, Paul D. *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978. \$15.95

Gibson, Ronald, ed. *Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy and Treaties Concluded by the Confederate States with Indian Tribes*. Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, 1977. \$12.50

Hall, Martin H. *The Confederate Army of New Mexico*. Austin, Texas: Presidial Press, 1978. \$17.50

Horzman, Robert S. *Stormy Ben Butler*. New York: Octagon Books, 1978. \$14.00. Reprint of 1954 issue from Macmillan.

Hyman, Harold M. *Era of the Oath: Northern Loyalty Tests during the Civil War and Reconstruction*. New York: Octagon Books, 1978. \$12.50. Reprint of Pennsylvania Press ed. of 1954.

Matloff, Maurice, ed. *The Civil War: A Concise Military History of the War between the States, 1861-1865*. Adapted from American Military History. Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Army: Maurice Matloff, General Editor. Illustrated by John W. Howard. New York: McKay, 1978. \$6.95

Meirs, Earl Schenck. *The Web of Victory: Grant at Vicksburg*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978. \$21.00. Reprint of Knopf edition of 1955.

Moore, Glover. *A Calhoun County, Alabama, Boy in the 1860's*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1978. \$5.00

Salisbury, Allen. *The Civil War and the American System. America's Battle with Britain, 1860-1876*. New York: Campaigner Publications, University Editions, 1978. Paper \$5.95

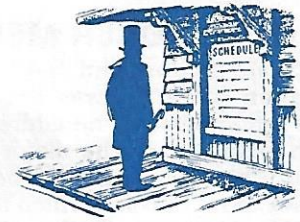
Sheridan, Philip Henry. *Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan, General, United States Army*. 2 vols. St. Clair Shores: Scholarly Press, 1977.

Stampp, Kenneth M. *Indiana Politics during the Civil War*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978. \$12.50. Reprint of 1949 publication by Indiana Historical Bureau.

Steffen, Randy. *The Horse Soldier, 1776-1943. Volume II: The Frontier, The Mexican War, The Civil War, The Indian Wars, 1851-1880*. Illustrations by the author. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978. \$25.00

Once again, the famed annual Neiman-Marcus Christmas Catalog has turned to the Civil War for one of its gift suggestions. Offered this year are various sets of original Civil War buttons suitable for wearing. Each set comes with an authentication certificate, is packed in a solid walnut box, and consists of three coat buttons and four cuff buttons. There are different types available, and the prices of each set are as follows: United States Army (\$200.00), United States Navy (\$200.00), Massachusetts Militia (\$400.00), Rhode Island Militia (\$400.00), South Carolina Militia (\$1,000.00), and Georgia Militia (a mere \$2,000.00). In addition to these Civil War sets, also available is a group of similar buttons of the Army of the Republic of Texas for the reasonable price of \$15,000.00. To make the Texas button set an even greater bargain, it comes complete with an Oxford blazer on which the buttons can be worn. Be sure to mail your orders early and avoid the Christmas rush.

BULLETIN BOARD



FUTURE MEETINGS

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

November 10: Gordon Whitney on "General Jefferson C. Davis".

December 8: Brooks Davis on "The Perryville Campaign".

January 12: Dr. Grady McWhiney on "Confederate Generals—Their Strengths and Weaknesses".

February 9: Dr. Mark E. Neeley on "Has The Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?"

March 9: Chris Calkins on "The Appomattox Campaign".

April 6: To be announced.

May 2-6: Annual Battlefield Tour—Shiloh and Northern Mississippi.

May 11: To be announced.

June 8: Nevins-Freeman Award Dinner and installation of officers.

Every Monday: Informal noon luncheon meetings at Wieboldt's Men's Grill, 9th Floor, State and Madison; all members welcome.

Last Tuesday of each month: Informal noon luncheon meetings at Caravelle Motel, River Road and Bryn Mawr Avenue, Rosemont; all members welcome.

NEW MEMBERS

Theodore Birndorf, 1221 N. Dearborn, Apt. 805N, Chicago, Illinois 60610.

Phyllis Connolly, 55 Cambridge Rd., Stamford, Connecticut 06902.

Thomas C. Connolly, 10418 S. Millard, Chicago, Illinois 60655.

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Richard W. Tereba, 18325 Oakwood Ave., Lansing, Illinois 60438.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Thomas Kearney, 26W119 Tomahawk Dr., Wheaton, Illinois 60187.

William C. "Jack" Davis, noted Civil War author and Editor of *Civil War Times Illustrated* and other historical publications, has been awarded the 1977 Fletcher Pratt award for continuing contributions to Civil War history. Among the subjects of Jack's many fine books have been John C. Breckinridge, the Battle of New Market, the Monitor-Merrimac Clash, and the Battle of First Bull Run. He has also received two Pulitzer Prize nominations.