

# THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume LIII, Number 9

Chicago, Illinois

May 1993

## William G. Piston on "Clio and the General: James Longstreet and the Writing of Southern History"

by Barbara Hughett

It might be said that Clio, the Muse of history, has not looked kindly upon Confederate General James Longstreet. Though he was acknowledged at the end of the Civil War as one of the South's foremost heroes, Longstreet became, during the Reconstruction period, a scapegoat for the defeat of the Confederacy.

Three basic explanations can be given to account for the remarkable transformation of Longstreet's place in history from that of hero to villain. First, he was the victim of a prolonged, skillful, and organized campaign of character assassination, carried out by members of the "Lee cult." Led by former Confederate General Jubal Early, this group used lies and innuendo to shift the blame for Robert E. Lee's disastrous defeat at Gettysburg from Lee's shoulders to Longstreet's.

Second, Longstreet was harmed—in the minds of Southern historians—by his connection with the Republican party during Reconstruction. When Longstreet led the all-black Louisiana state militia into battle against white supremacists in New Orleans, he became a traitor to the white race in the eyes of most Southerners. Shocked and angered by his actions, Southerners were thereafter willing to believe anything negative about Longstreet, particularly about his past military record; historical truth was irrelevant.

Finally, Longstreet was at times his own worst enemy. When writing to defend his military record, he displayed a vanity and jealousy of the reputations of Lee and "Stonewall" Jackson which had not characterized him during the war. These writings alienated many of his contemporaries and served to mislead subsequent twentieth-century historians.

On May 14, William G. Piston will address The Civil War Round Table. His topic will be "Clio and the General: James Longstreet and the Writing of Southern History." In his presentation, Piston will stress his belief that, though Longstreet committed a number of errors on fields of battle, his strengths outweighed his shortcomings.

Piston is currently assistant professor of history at Southwest Missouri State University. He pre-



William G. Piston



### 521st Regular Meeting

☆ ☆ ☆

William G. Piston on "Clio and the General: James Longstreet and the Writing of Southern History"

☆ ☆ ☆

Friday, May 14

☆ ☆ ☆

Holiday Inn Mart Plaza  
350 North Orleans Street  
Buttons—15th floor

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.  
\$20.00 per person

Entree: Chicken Italiano, Filet of Sole,  
or Fruit Plate



### A Reminder

Please make your reservation by Wednesday, May 12. Mail the enclosed postcard or call the book shop at (312) 944-3085.

If you are driving and coming from the south, turn left into the Mart Plaza lot just after crossing the river on Orleans. From the north, turn right from Orleans on Hubbard, left on Kingsbury, right on Kinzie, and left into the Mart Plaza lot. Parking is free.

viously taught at the University of New Orleans and served as chairman of the Social Studies Department at the Louise S. McGehee School in New Orleans. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Vanderbilt University and his Ph.D. from the University of South Carolina.

In addition to writing numerous articles on various aspects of Civil War history, Piston is the author of *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History* (1987). He is also the author of *Carter's Raid: An Episode of the Civil War in East Tennessee* (1989), a booklet which chronicles the first large-scale, long-dis-

(continued on page 4)



## THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



**Founded December 3, 1940**

357 West Chicago Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60610  
Phone: (312) 944-3085

### Officers

President .....	Mary Munsell Abroe
Senior Vice President .....	Kurt Carlson
Vice President .....	Barbara Hughett
Vice President .....	John M. Coverick, Sr.
Secretary .....	Ted Birndorf
Treasurer .....	Carole Cierniak
Assistant Secretary .....	Joyce Warshaw
Assistant Treasurer .....	Steven Horton
Inspector General .....	Bruce Allardice
Membership Registrar .....	Joan Carlson
Tour Registrar .....	Carole Le Claire
Newsletter Editor .....	Barbara Hughett
Contributing Editors .....	C. Robert Douglas, David Richert
Founding Newsletter Editor:	Gil Twiss, 1954-1968

### Board of Trustees

Terms expiring in 1993:	Robert Girardi, Michael Marienthal, Norman Potesman, Dale Weitman
Terms expiring in 1994:	Charles Bednar, Robert Dawson, Adrienne Hanrahan, James Nethery

### Committee Chairs

Battlefield Tour .....	Barbara Hughett Don Anderson
Nevins-Freeman Award .....	David Richert
Membership .....	Daniel R. Weinberg
Hospitality .....	Susan Phillips Robert Schell
Nominating .....	Joseph L. Wisheart
Field Artist/Archives .....	Jerry Warshaw
Honors .....	Paul I. Klinger
Publicity/Public Relations .....	Roger Bohn Charles Shields William Hupp
Battlefield Preservation and Schimmelfenning Boutique .....	Ted Birndorf
Tape Record Librarian .....	Hal Ardell
House .....	Charles Bednar Larry Gibbs
Picnic.....	Paul Kleckner

The only requirement for membership in The Round Table is a genuine interest in the Civil War and its era. For information, address Dan Weinberg, 357 W. Chicago Ave., Chicago, IL 60610.



### Executive Committee Meeting

President Mary Abroe has announced there will be an Executive Committee meeting at **4:45 p.m.**, prior to the May 14 meeting, in *Buttons*. The main item on the agenda is the 1994 battlefield tour site. All officers, committee chairs, and past presidents are urged to attend.

## BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION

☆ UPDATE ☆

by David Richert

The state of Maryland has purchased a five-acre parcel of land at the Grove Farm at Antietam. It was acquired from the American Legion, which bought the property five years ago with the intention of building a new post home. The state made the acquisition as part of a major initiative to preserve Civil War sites.

The Grove Farm was the scene of a meeting between President Lincoln and General George McClellan in the wake of Antietam. The Legion Post would have been right in front of the Grove Farm house, which still stands. A forty-acre parcel of land abutting the five acres purchased by the state was bought recently by the Save Historic Antietam Foundation.

**The Civil War Trust**, with the help of the National Park Trust, has purchased fifty-six acres of land adjacent to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. The parcel includes the School House Ridge area where Confederate General Stonewall Jackson masterminded the siege and capture of the 12,500 man Union garrison in September 1862. The property had been threatened by a plan to develop as many as 180 single-family homes and town houses.

According to Park historian Dennis Frye, the tract acquired by the Trust is "part of the core of the Confederate siege, and it can be viewed from virtually every site on the battlefield. Had it been lost to development, the historic integrity of Jackson's siege and capture would have been destroyed." The area remains remarkably as it was during the battle.

The Trust, which was created in 1991 as a private, nonprofit organization charged with raising private-sector funds in a national campaign to save endangered Civil War battlefields, paid \$440,000 for the land. The purchase of the Harpers Ferry battleground was the Trust's first outright acquisition of a property.

**The National Park Service** recently conducted a mapping project at Port Hudson, Louisiana. The purpose was to locate and map selected battlefield features, particularly surviving earthen fortifications, and to produce digital data and hard copy maps that will be shared with the 640-acre state park and state and local planners.

Almost two miles of surviving fortifications were mapped and another two miles of the original Confederate defensive perimeter associated with the 1863 siege of Port Hudson that have been lost were documented. Other features, such as standing historic structures, house sites, old road beds, and hiking trails, were also mapped. Thanks to the cooperation of local landowners, the survey team was able to include battlefield sites outside the park boundaries.

**Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt** has ordered a halt to the expansion of a controversial riding stable at Manassas Battlefield Park. The project was going to cost about \$37,000. Babbitt also said the stable would be off limits to high ranking government personnel. Its use by former Vice President Dan Quayle and other officials had prompted protests. Manassas is the only battlefield park to have a mounted ranger program; it costs about \$50,000 a year. The Park Service has announced a study of the program.



## ☪ APRIL MEETING ☪

by Barbara Hughett

"Longstreet's assault on the third day at Gettysburg . . . has been more written about . . . than any event in American history. Some of these accounts are simply silly. Some are false in statement. Some are false in inference. All in some respects are untrue." So wrote one frustrated student in 1888. Over one hundred more years of Pickett's Charge stories could easily convince one of the correctness of the old adage that history is just "an agreed-upon lie."

On April 16, historian Carol A. Reardon addressed 148 members and guests at the 520th regular meeting of The Civil War Round Table. Her topic was "Images of Pickett's Charge in Southern History."

"During the fifty years between Appomattox and World War I," Reardon noted, "the events of a few hours on the afternoon of one hot July day in 1863 became ensnared in a sticky web of selective memory and time-honored tradition, deep-felt pride and long-lost dreams, hopes for the future and making peace with the past. Indeed, Southerners made the story of Pickett's Charge wonderfully chameleon-like, taking on shadings and nuances that reflect the pride and prejudices of who told the story and why. The cause of history still reels."

What really happened on the afternoon of July 1, 1863? Reardon began to address this question by mentioning some members of the "cast of players": "Major General George E. Pickett's newly-arrived division of James Longstreet's First Corps—anywhere from 4500 to 6200 strong—included fifteen veteran Virginia regiments, divided equally in three brigades, led by Richard Garnett, Lewis Armistead, and James L. Kemper. . . . Also participating was the division of Major General Henry Heth of A.P. Hill's Third Corps. Heth's men suffered heavy losses on July 1. Heth himself was wounded. On July 3, Brigadier General James Johnston Pettigrew was entering his second day in command of a division made up of Alabamians, Tennesseans, North Carolinians, Mississippians, and a few Virginians. Two more North Carolina brigades, under the temporary command of Isaac Trimble, served as Pettigrew's support. The total number of Confederate troops in the attack . . . was somewhere between 12,000 and 13,000. The assault took about one hour." Over 7000 men were killed, captured, or wounded when the attack was repulsed by Northern forces.

Battlefield gossip ran wild after the attack, and it was difficult to sort out what was true. State rivalries colored reports of the charge. Private William H. Cocke, of the 9th Virginia, who survived the charge, wrote: "Our division charged the enemies' breastworks on the heights and suffered severely—the troops which should have supported us failing to do so and running like sheep—thanks to Gracious they were NOT Virginia troops. . . ." Lieutenant William Calder, of the 2nd North Carolina, wrote home that the assault "was the finest charge of the war and had Pickett's division been supported we could have held the field. . . ."

An article written by war correspondent Jonathan Albertson accused Pettigrew's men of being "green" and "wavering," of lacking the "firmness of nerve, and steadiness of tread which so characterized Pickett's men. . . ." Albertson's sharp indictments were reprinted widely in Southern newspapers, and his article provided what Reardon called "the durable skeleton for what would become the 'Virginia version' of Pickett's Charge."

However, she added, "Pettigrew's men were not green troops. His inference that Pettigrew's troops were Pickett's missing supports and not part of the assault force itself was also incorrect, as both Lee's and Longstreet's reports make clear. But, as with most first impressions, these images have been hard to shake."

Pettigrew's and Trimble's men sometimes called themselves the "forgotten half," as they chafed under the weight of the Pickett men's orgy of self-praise. Objective narratives were written, but the old story continued to prevail. Pickett's widow (he died in 1875) Sallie devoted much time and what Reardon referred to as her "marginal literary talents" to promoting her husband's good name. Described as "insufferably romantic," she wrote *Pickett and His Men* (1898) and other works—including a series of articles for *Cosmopolitan* magazine (1913)—which glorified George Pickett's heroism, with little or no mention of Pettigrew or Trimble.

Nearly 130 years after Pickett's Charge, careful scholars are still working to untangle the true from the false about the encounter, and discovering that "there is much about this much-studied battle that we are not nearly as clear on as we might think." Reardon said that much of the Virginia version of the charge remains intact, "chiefly because large parts of it were true all along." She reflected that, "as we begin to understand the importance of memory to a people—memory, as opposed to history at times—we can see why all this was so important to the war's survivors and their children. . . . But we also must seek the truth."

Reardon closed with this observation: "Whether or not our own generation can relate to William Faulkner's observation that for every Southern boy, there comes a time when it is still July 3 and the cannonade has not yet started—and after it does, life will never be quite the same—we must still admit that it is a rare event in our past that simply will not relinquish its hold on the American memory and imagination. And that in itself makes the story of the story of Pickett's Charge a peculiarly appealing tribute to an infantry assault that failed."

---

### Nominating Committee Report

Joseph Wisheart, chairman of the Nominating Committee, has announced the following proposed slate of officers for the 1993-94 term:

President	Kurt Carlson
Senior Vice President	Barbara Hughett
Vice President	Carole Cierniak
Vice President	Robert Girardi
Treasurer	Larry Gibbs
Secretary	Bruce Allardice
Assistant Treasurer	James Nethery
Assistant Secretary	Michael Marienthal
Trustee	Gene Holland
Trustee	Carole Le Claire
Trustee	Frank Patton
Trustee	Jerome Schur
Trustee (to fill the unexpired term of James Nethery)	Norman Poteshman

The election will be held during the May meeting, at which time additional nominations for any of the above offices may be made from the floor. Three current trustees—Charles Bednar, Robert Dawson, and Adrienne Hanrahan—will remain in office as they complete their two-year terms.



## The New Books

Compiled by C. Robert Douglas



- Blight, David W., ed. *When This Cruel War is Over: The Civil War Letters of Charles Harvey Brewster*. U. of Massachusetts Press. 1992. \$25.00.
- Boritt, Gabor, ed. *Lincoln, The War President*. Oxford University Press. 1992. \$22.00.
- Braden, Waldo W. *Abraham Lincoln, Public Speaker*. LSU Press. 1992. Pbk. \$8.95. Original of 1989.
- Castel, Albert. *Decision in the West: The Atlanta Campaign of 1864*. U. Press of Kansas. 1992. \$29.95.
- Castel, Albert. *General Sterling Price and the Civil War in the West*. LSU Press. 1992. Pbk. \$14.95. Original of 1968.
- Clinton, Catherine and Nina Silber. *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*. Oxford University Press. 1992. \$29.95; Pbk. \$14.95.
- Cooling, Benjamin F., III. *Symbol, Sword and Shield: Defending Washington During the Civil War*. White Mane Publ. Co. 1991. \$27.95. Original of 1975.
- Cornelius, Janet D. *When I Can Read my Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery and Religion in the Antebellum South*. U. of S. Carolina Press. 1991. \$34.95.

### Piston (continued from page 1)

tance Federal cavalry raid of the Civil War, and is in the process of editing for publication the memoirs of General Samuel P. Carter. With Richard W. Hatcher, he is working on a book on the Battle of Wilson's Creek.

A past president and program chair of The Civil War Round Table of the Ozarks, Piston currently serves as the group's treasurer. He is a member of the board of trustees of the Museum of Ozarks' History.

**Garry Wills recently was awarded a Pulitzer Prize**, in the general non-fiction category, for his *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America* (1992).

### "Tenting Tonight?"

Is anyone interested in singing, playing, and researching the music of the Civil War era? Member Eileen Crowley is seeking to form a group if sufficient interest is indicated. You can reach Eileen at (312) 413-1490 from 8:00 a.m. till 3:30 p.m., or at (312) 545-6253, from 5:00 till 8:00 p.m.

The history of The Round Table, *The Civil War Round Table: Fifty Years of Scholarship and Fellowship*, by Barbara Hughett, is available for \$30 per copy. You may purchase the book at the monthly meeting or order it from Morningside Bookshop, 260 Oak Street, Dayton, Ohio 45401 (1-800-648-9710). Add \$2.50 for postage and handling.

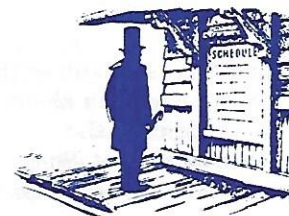
### Schimmelfennig Boutique

In addition to The Round Table history, the following items are available at each monthly meeting:

- Lapel pins \$3.00 each, two for \$5.00
- Mugs \$2.00 each, two for \$3.00
- Meeting tapes \$7.00 each
- Civil War Buff posters \$10.00 each

Proceeds from the sale of these items go to support the programs of The Civil War Round Table.

## BULLETIN BOARD



### FUTURE MEETINGS

Regular meetings are held at the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 North Orleans Street (Buttons, 15th Floor), the second Friday in each month, except as noted.

May 6-9: Annual Battlefield Tour—Vicksburg

May 14: William G. Piston on "Clio and the General: James Longstreet and the Writing of Southern History"

June 11: Frances Kennedy on "Community Benefits of Battlefield Preservation"

September 10: William A. Young, Jr., on "Pickett's Charge: A First-Person Impression of the Reverend First Lieutenant George W. Finley"

October 8: Stephen B. Oates, Nevins-Freeman Address

November 12: K. Jerry Williams on "The Confederate Navy in England"

### New Members

Melvin Brandt, 3624 N. Hermitage, Chicago, IL 60613, (312) 525-0341

Joseph G. Peco, 1641 Brighton Drive, Mundelein, IL 60060, (708) 566-8495

### Change of Address

Frank Meacham, 4832 Hunting Hills Drive, Roanoke, VA 24014, (703) 774-3318

**Member John Gallagher** is interested in networking with other writers among the Round Table membership. He is writing a historical novel set in the Civil War period and would like to start a writers' group. If you are interested, call John at (708) 858-9039.

**The Lincoln Group of Illinois** has scheduled its annual meeting and luncheon for Saturday, June 12, at Illinois Benedictine College in Lisle. Registration will begin at 11:30 a.m. There will be a \$6.50 charge for a box lunch. The speakers this year are Thomas F. Schwartz, curator of the Henry Horner Lincoln Collection at the Illinois State Historical Library, and Lincoln collector Jack Smith. For additional information, call Philip Bean at (708) 960-1500.

**The National Museum of Civil War Medicine** is sponsoring its First Annual Conference on Civil War Medicine, from August 6-8, at Shepherd College in Sheperdstown, West Virginia, and Antietam National Battlefield in Sharpsburg, Maryland. Speakers will include Round Table member Gordon Dammann and Robert K. Krick, recipient of The Round Table's 1988 Nevins-Freeman Award. The conference will feature a tour of Antietam hospital sites.

**Pearl April was presented with The Round Table's Distinguished Service Award** at the April meeting. This honor is periodically bestowed on non-members who have made outstanding contributions to The Civil War Round Table. Pearl April has been The Round Table's calligrapher for over fifteen years.