

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume XXXVII, Number 9

Chicago, Illinois

May 1977

DR. RICHARD J. SOMMERS ON "SEIGE OF PETERSBURG"

On May 13th our featured speaker will be Dr. Richard J. Sommers, Archivist—Historian of the U.S. Army Military History Research Collection at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. His topic for the evening will be the Siege of Petersburg and to aid us in our understanding of this campaign, he plans to accompany his remarks with a slide presentation of battle maps. Dr. Sommers will point out that the Siege of Petersburg was the longest campaign of the Civil War, nine and a half months in duration. It was also the campaign that destroyed the Army of Northern Virginia as an effective fighting force. He will give particular attention to operations in the fall of 1864, which are some of the most significant, and yet least known, operations of the war. Yet, as Dr. Sommers notes, Petersburg has received remarkably little attention from historians, despite its importance.



Richard J. Sommers

Richard J. Sommers is a native of the Mid-West, having been raised in the Calumet City area, where his parents still reside. He did his undergraduate work at Carleton College and his doctoral work under Dr. Frank E. Vandiver at Rice University. Following his graduation he was a research historian for the Jefferson Davis Association. Since October, 1970, he has been on the staff of the U.S. Army Military Research Collection. His many publications include articles in "Civil War History" and "Civil War Times Illustrated"; Civil War book reviews in those two periodicals plus "Military Affairs", the "Journal of Southern History", and "Parameters". Forthcoming works include the chapter on "American Military History, 1815-1917" in "The Guide to Military History" as well as entries for The Encyclopedia of Southern History. Dr. Sommers' book on the Siege of Petersburg, "Richmond Redeemed", is expected to be published in the autumn of 1977. In addition to his busy work schedule of research and writing he is active in the Harrisburg Civil War Round Table, serving as Vice President, 1972-73, President and Editor, 1973-74, and Program Chairman since 1973. He has addressed a number of Round Tables around the country, including our own when we visited Carlisle Barracks in May, 1973.

In the fall of 1864, Grant was accomplishing an important objective. He was immobilizing the South's most powerful striking force by forcing Lee's still potent Army of Northern Virginia into a defensive position around Richmond and Petersburg. After Grant's failure at the Battle of the Crater, his strategy became one of extending his siege lines around Petersburg and cutting Lee's supply lines. The first step in this direction was the capture of a portion of the Weldon Railroad near Globe Tavern on August 18th and 19th, thereby causing the loss of this important supply route for the Confederacy. Constant skirmishing occurred between the lines until late September when Grant



361st REGULAR MEETING

DR. RICHARD J. SOMMERS

on

"Siege of Petersburg"

Friday, May 13, 1977

Chicago Bar Association,

29 South LaSalle Street

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m.

Dinner at 6:30 p.m.



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

An important Executive Committee Meeting will be held in a separate meeting room at the Bar Association at 5:00 p.m. on May 13, 1977, just prior to the regular meeting scheduled for that date. Among the items on the agenda are the site of the 1978 Battlefield Tour and a status report from the Research Center Committee. All current officers, trustees, and committee chairmen, as well as all past presidents, are urged to attend.

decided to attempt the capture of the Southside Railroad. While Union forces attacked Fort Harrison near Richmond as a diversion, Meade was ordered to move in a North-West direction toward the Southside Railroad. Fighting took place near Peeble's Farm on the 29th thru Oct. 1st. Although the Union forces failed to hold the railroad, they did succeed in extending their lines an additional three miles.

Another effort to capture the Southside Railroad was made in late October with a movement toward the Boynton Plank Road and a stream known as Hatcher's Run. Heavy fighting occurred near Burgess Mill. However, once again Grant's encircling movement to cut Lee's railroad was checked, this time because of the lack of coordination between Hancock's Second Corps and Warren's Fifth Corps. This was the last major effort made by Grant before winter. Lee was compelled to extend his lines over a thirty-five mile front, with the left resting on the Williamsburg Road east of Richmond and the right on Hatcher's Run southwest of Petersburg. Grant's strangle hold on Lee would continue until final victory was obtained on April 9, 1865.

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



FOUNDED DECEMBER 3, 1940

18 East Chestnut Street
Chicago Illinois 60611
Phone: (312) 944-3085

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Battlefield Preservation	Marvin Sanderman

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.



The New Market, Virginia, Battlefield Park is now featuring an exhibit on "The Civil War at Sea". This presentation, which will run through June 15, 1977, features a model of the Monitor's pilot house, four displays on loan from the Truxton-Decatur Naval Museum, prints from the Mariners Museum, artifacts from the Museum of the Confederacy, and other items from the Naval Ship Research and Development Center. In addition, the Tenth Annual reenactment of the battle of New Market will be held May 8 at the Battlefield Park.

*from the
Editor's pen*



It would appear that we have a genuine literary controversy on our hands. That subject is Robert E. Lee and the immediate cause of the controversy is a new book authored by University of South Carolina history professor Thomas L. Connelly. Well known for his fine two volume history of the Army of Tennessee, Connelly has also been a long-time and outspoken critic of Lee and the post-war Virginia authors who, Connelly believes, created a cloak of god-like immorality around the great Southern general.

In "The Marble Man", recently published by Alfred A. Knopf, Connelly has put into writing his feelings and, as anyone who has heard him speak on the subject might expect, his words are not exactly complimentary to either Marse Robert or his Old Dominion defenders. Reaction has been swift and to say the least, not peaceful. Reviewers across the country have set pen to paper and their articles have already appeared in the leading literary supplements. Obviously there is no bland opinion on this book, for each writer has either lavished praise upon it or degraded it unmercifully.

Unfortunately, it is this wide diversion of feeling that makes us very uneasy. Each cannot be right. How can such eminent historians as James L. "Bud" Robertson and C. Vann Woodward differ so greatly. We fear the answer may lie in the fact that the reviewers are reacting not to the book itself, but to their own view on Lee. In other words, their comments may be based not on the objective quality of Connelly's work, but on their subjective response to what he says. If that is the case, it is most unfortunate.

It is not our purpose at this time to defend or pan this book. Rather we call for a fair opinion of it and, more importantly, a further examination of its subject matter. An unbiased critical appraisal of Robert E. Lee and his legend has been needed for many years. If Dr. Connelly has provided it, so be it. If not, we hope his book will spur someone else to do it. Civil war students, both North and South, academic and amateur, can only profit from it.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

At the April meeting, Ward Smidl, Co-Chairman of the Nominating Committee, announced the following proposed slate of officers for the 1977-78 year:

President	Myron Cohn
Senior Vice President	Glen Wiche
Vice President	Irwin Levin
Vice President	Robert Walter
Secretary	Merlin Sumner
Treasurer	James Huber
Assistant Secretary	James Girman
Assistant Treasurer	Daniel Weinberg
Trustee	Donald Anderson
Trustee	Henry Pomerantz
Trustee	William Sullivan
Trustee	Robert Zeigler

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. Installation of the new officers will be part of the program at the Nevins-Freeman Award Dinner on June 10th. Four current members of the Board of Trustees, John E. Comerford, Raymond J. Jankovich, Jr., Hugh P. McAniff, and Marvin Sanderman will remain in office for the coming year as they complete their two-year terms.

APRIL MEETING

Our own member, Elden C. "Josh" Billings, of Washington, D.C., was our speaker on April 15, 1977. Sixty-two members and guests were in attendance as Josh presented his "Critical Character Sketch" of William J. Sherman. He began his remarks with a brief description of Sherman's pre-Civil War career, pointing out that by 1861, despite service in the Army for thirteen years, Sherman had not achieved the success, in either military or civilian life, to which the positions of his natural and adoptive families and his standing at West Point seemed to qualify him.

Promoted to Brigadier General and sent to Kentucky after seeing action at First Bull Run, Sherman was forced to assume command upon the illness of his superior, Robert Anderson. Almost immediately, he became upset over the lack of training of his Army, failing to realize the Confederates were in no better shape than he was. Sherman put into effect a policy of not permitting press releases from his camp, an action which led to a feud with the newspapers that was to last throughout the war. During a conference with Secretary of War Cameron, in the presence of journalists, Sherman stated he felt two hundred thousand men were needed to secure the area for the Union. Although Sherman later claimed he was referring to the entire Mississippi Valley, Cameron and the reporters thought he meant only Kentucky. Shocked by the answer, Cameron later made a remark which the press interpreted as an opinion that Sherman was unbalanced. Subsequent newspaper stories embellished this to a rumor of insanity and the General asked to be relieved.

In 1862, Sherman was assigned to command a division in Grant's Army. Posted in an advance position near Shiloh. Sherman failed to perform adequate reconnaissance and, when attacked, failed to immediately realize the seriousness of the assault. However, once the situation did become clear, his performance became a tower of strength in the eventual Federal victory and his relationship with Grant was forged. Despite this bond, Sherman criticized, in writing, Grant's strategy before Vicksburg in the spring of 1863. Instead he favored a return to Memphis and another attempt at an overland campaign. In this theory, Sherman evidenced his lack of insight into the political implications that would follow from what would appear to be a retreat.

The balance of 1863 saw other actions by Sherman which can easily be described as failures. After the capture of Jackson, he made no attempt to march on either Mobile or Selma, blaming the oppressive heat and lack of water for his inaction. Ordered to Chattanooga to assist the besieged Rosecrans, Sherman was late in arriving because he insisted on bringing his slow-moving trains with him. In the movement against Missionary Ridge, on November 24, he did not push his men forward and Cleburn thus beat him to the important position at Tunnel Hill. During the attack on the next day, Sherman repeatedly assaulted the enemy's strongest point instead of selecting a method by which it could be flanked. After each of these incidents, Grant covered Sherman's mistakes, sometimes accepting the blame himself.

During the Atlanta campaign, Sherman proved a master of maneuver, but his decision to attempt a frontal attack at Kennesaw Mountain proved to be a disaster. In his report, Sherman accepted the blame for this ill-conceived assault, but years later, in his memoirs, he falsely stated that Thomas, McPherson and Schofield had supported the plan. Josh believes that Sherman made this attack because his troops were grumbling about the constant marching and were becoming convinced Sherman was afraid to fight, because the Virginia campaign was getting all the attention, and because his supply line was becoming extended. None of these reasons can, of course, justify the action. Sherman can also be criticized for his tactics during the Battle of Atlanta where, after exposing his left flank, he left the Army of the Tennessee to fight off the Confederate attack alone while the rest of his force did nothing to help.

The March to the Sea was merely a gigantic raid, as, while it did destroy substantial economic resources and Southern

TO THE CAMPFOLLOWERS (LADIES)

As previously announced, there was no Campfollowers meeting in April. However, on May 13, 1977 we will assemble to hear Dr. George J. Fleming discuss "After The War", a review of the political and social effects of Reconstruction. Dr. Fleming, a long time member of The Round Table, is Professor of History at Calumet College in Hammond, Indiana. The meeting will be held at Stouffer's Restaurant, Wabash and Randolph Streets. Cocktails will be served at 5:30 p.m., the program will begin at 6:00 p.m. and dinner will follow at 6:30 p.m. Add your reservation to your husband's card or call Margaret April at 787-1860.

Our own Inspector General, Charles D. Wesselhoeft, will speak to the May 19th, 1977 meeting of the Milwaukee Civil War Round Table. His topic will be "Civil War Railroads". The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. in the Gold Room of the Wisconsin Club in Milwaukee.

The most recent work of our good friend and regular Battlefield Tour companion, Alice Cromie, has just been published. Entitled "Tour Guide to the Old West" it will prove a most fitting companion to her previous book "Tour Guide to the Civil War", which is already in its second printing.

On Saturday, May 14, 1977 members of the St. Louis Civil War Round Table will tour the many historic sites in Springfield, Illinois. Guided by Illinois State Archivist Wayne Temple, the group will visit the restored Old State Capital, the Lincoln Depot, and the Lincoln Tomb in Oak Ridge Cemetery, plus other additional stops. Also included on the agenda will be a picnic lunch and a dinner at the St. Nicholas Hotel.

morale, it met no significant armed resistance. Josh feels the destination of the March, Savannah, was wrong. Instead, he proposes, Sherman should have gone to Augusta and then into the Carolinas, thus preventing Johnston from gaining the time to gather the force which he used to oppose the eventual Northward movement.

In summary, Josh characterized Sherman as an excellent organizer and administrator who had a ready grasp of problems, understood thoroughly the art of war, and was able to subordinate all activity to the needs of the Army. However, he was a very emotional man and this trait led him into serious errors of judgment, such as those committed in Kentucky in 1861 and the unauthorized surrender terms offered Johnston in 1865. Also, he was a mediocre battlefield tactician as he proved at Shiloh, Missionary Ridge, Kennesaw, and Atlanta. His greatest, though probably most unappreciated, contribution was his theory of total war which, while producing civilian hardship, brought a quicker end to hostilities, thus reducing the eventual total number of casualties.

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)

Andrews, Eliza Frances. *The War-time Journal of a Georgia Girl, 1864-1865*. Edited by Spencer Bidwell King, Jr. Covington, Georgia: Cherokee Publ. Co., 1976. \$10.00. First issued in 1960.

Bradlow, Edna and Frank. *Here Comes the Alabama*. Birmingham, Alabama: Southern University Press, 1976. \$7.95. Originally published in Cape Town, 1958.

Edmiston, Fred W. *Washington Slept Here: A Cacophony in Scarlet*. New York: Carlton Press, 1977. (Prostitution in the Civil War.)

Fehrenbacher, Don E., editor. *Abraham Lincoln: A Documentary Portrait through his Speeches and Writings*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977. \$10.00; paper \$2.95. Reissue of a 1964 paperback.

The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant. Volume 6: September 1 - December 8, 1862. Edited by John Y. Simon. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977. \$17.50

Hyman, Harold M. *Union and Confidence: The 1860's*. New York: Crowell, 1976.

Lucas, Marion B. *Sherman and the Burning of Columbia*. College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University Press, 1976. \$10.95.

McKinley, James. *Assassination in America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. \$10.95.

Oates, Stephen B. *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. \$15.95

Ruffin, Edmund. *The Diary of Edmund Ruffin*. Volume II: The Years of Hope, April, 1861-June, 1863. Edited by William Kauffman Scarborough. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976. \$35.00

Smith, C. Carter, editor. *Two Naval Journals 1864*. Birmingham, Alabama: Southern University Press, 1976. \$3.95. Two accounts of a naval battle fought on Mobile Bay, one by a Confederate, the other by a Federal.

Voorhis, Horace J. *The Life and Times of Aurelius Lyman Voorhis/Jerry Voorhis, Sr.* New York: Vantage Press, 1976. \$8.50. Concerns 465h Indiana Vols.

Weichmann, Louis J. *A True History of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the Conspiracy of 1865*. New York: Knopf, 1975. Paperback \$5.95.

We were sorry to learn of the recent resignation, effective April 1, of J. Richard Stoltz from his position as President of Lincoln College. Dick served five years as head of this fine downstate Illinois institution. We extend to him and his family our sincere best wishes as he assumes his new duties as Director of Development of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City.

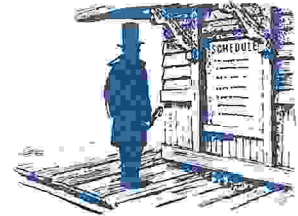
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The New York Civil War Round Table has announced that there are two winners of its 1977 Baroness/Lincoln Award. The recipients are Mable Kunkel, a retired Richmond, Kentucky school teacher, for her book "Abraham Lincoln: Unforgettable American", and Lincoln scholar and historian Stefan Lorant for his pictorial work "Lincoln: A Picture Story of his Life".

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The Third Annual National Congress of Civil War Round Tables is now scheduled for October 6-8 at Jackson, Mississippi. The three day program will include remarks by many prominent Civil War scholars, a seminar on Civil War battlefield preservation, tours of the Champion Hill and Vicksburg battlefields, and visits to several ante-bellum homes, as well as the Old State Capitol and Governor's Mansion. Anyone interested in attending the Congress can contact your editor for further information.

BULLETIN BOARD



FUTURE MEETINGS

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

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 MEMBER

J. Robert Watt, 328 Nuttall Road, Riverside, Illinois 60546.

Lumir Buresh, long time member of the Kansas City Civil War Round Table, and representatives of the Kansas State historical society recently laid out the tour path and marker locations for the Mine Creek Battlefield. Several walking tours have been planned and a tour pamphlet should be available when the Battlefield opens this summer. Lumir, who has been with us on several recent Battlefield Tours, is preparing a book on this little known, but important, battle which occurred during Price's retreat from Westport.

* * * * *

Lilian Sandburg, widow of poet and Lincoln historian Carl Sandburg died recently at her North Carolina home at the age of 93. Originally born in Hancock, Michigan, Mrs. Sandburg graduated Phi Beta Kappa in Mathematics from the University of Illinois. She met Mr. Sandburg in 1907 and they were married in 1908. At the time of his death in 1967, they had just celebrated their 59th wedding anniversary. According to her instructions, Mrs. Sandburg's body was cremated and her ashes were placed alongside her late husband's at his birth place in Galesburg, Illinois.

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The Dr. Samuel A. Mudd house, and ten (10) acres surrounding it, have been purchased by the State of Maryland. The former home of the physician who treated John Wilkes Booth on his escape from Washington will be transformed into an historical museum. Anyone having items appropriate for historical display or wishing to donate funds to assist in the project can contact The Committee for the Restoration of the Samuel A. Mudd House, Inc., Box 66, Route 3, LaPlata, Maryland 20646.

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At last report, a bill was still pending before the Wisconsin State Legislature which, if passed, would result in the eviction from the State Capitol Building of the G.A.R. War Museum. In addition to the problem of finding a replacement home for the collection, such a move would also seriously endanger the condition of the museum's outstanding collection of regimental battle flags. While we are not unmindful of the space requirements of modern government, legislation of this type evidences a complete disregard for the preservation of our national heritage.